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MEDITATIONS
ON THE
LIFE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

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3

MEDITATIONS
ON THE
LIFE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN,
FOR
EVERY DAY IN THE MONTH ;
SUITABLE FOR ALL SEASONS, AND ESPECIALLY FOR
THE MONTH OF MAY.

PRECEDED BY A LETTER FROM
MGR. DUPANLOUP, BISHOP OF ORLEANS.

WITH A PREFACE

BY
HIS GRACE THE ARCHBISHOP OF WESTMINSTER.
BIBLIOTHÈQUE S. J.

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LONDON :
THOMAS RICHARDSON AND SON,
DUBLIN AND DERBY.
NEW YORK : HENRY H. RICHARDSON AND CO.
MDCCCLXX.

PREFACE.

The Author and Finisher of the Devotion which the Church perpetuates to the Blessed Mother of God, was Jesus Himself. He founded it by His own example, and taught it to His disciples by His own words and deeds. They who reproach us for the honour we pay to her, reproach Him, for we have never honoured her so much as He did. The devotion, or worship as we say in our old English speech, which the Catholic Church teaches to her children, may be best defined in these words; it is the love and veneration which was paid to her by her divine Son and His disciples, and such as we should have borne to her if we had been on earth with them; and it is also the love and veneration we shall bear to her next after her divine Son, when through grace we see Him in His kingdom.

The disciples, from the moment of their call to follow Jesus, learned to know,

reverence, and love His Mother. She was the mother of their Master, of Him who had spoken to them, as never had any man spoken before. His words penetrated and fascinated their hearts with a thrill of awe and love such as no human voice had ever caused till then. He had wrought miracles in their sight, He had healed the sick, opened blind eyes, cleansed lepers, walked upon the sea, raised the dead. And He had manifested in their presence alone, a honour to His Mother such as He showed to no other. The perfection of His character was the measure of the perfection of His filial bearing towards her. His manner towards her was the measure also of her dignity, both personally and in relation to Himself. It cast a light upon her by which they saw that she had about her some mystery of blessedness, as He also had some mystery of more than human greatness. They did not indeed know as yet either His incarnation, nor her divine maternity. But they knew, felt, saw, that never yet on earth was there such a Son or such a mother. This sense and instruction continually unfolded as the events of the life, the passion, the

resurrection, the ascension, came upon them. They were being gradually led onward and upward from truth to truth, and from light to light, till the perfect illuminations to know His power, wisdom, love, royalty, and Godhead came down upon them on the day of Pentecost. It is certain, that in proportion as they learned to know the Godhead of the Son, they learned also to know the dignity of the mother; these two truths unfolded themselves side by side. They who can believe that the light of Pentecost did not reveal the full mystery of the Holy Trinity and of the Incarnation, may also believe that the divine maternity and the personal sanctity of the Mother of God were also not fully known. But to those who believe that the revelation of Pentecost contained the full illumination of faith, must believe that the apostles knew with perfect precision the relative dignity, and the personal perfections of the Incarnate God, and of His Blessed Mother. The circle of the faith at this day is coincident with the circle of the revelation on the day of Pentecost. And the glory of Jesus, and the dignity of His Mother, though more explicitly

traced out in the Theological Science of the Church, are identical and of the same precise outline now as they were then. The faith and its objects became a consciousness of the soul. What before was received by sense, reason, experience, was elevated to an intuition and a spiritual habit of the heart and mind. After the ascension the disciples felt a two-fold bond; on one hand, drawing them upward by divine worship and obedience to their divine Master, sitting at the right hand of God; our "anchor of the soul, sure and firm, and which entereth in even within the veil;"* on the other, a relative love, veneration, and filial piety, binding them to the mother of their Divine Redeemer. Now this is neither more nor less but precisely, and in all its thoughts and affections, the devotion or worship which we bear to the Blessed Mother of God. In no point do we go beyond the devotion of the disciples, in no point did the devotion of the disciples fall short of ours. Nay, I will be bold to say, that no one, not even the saints of the Church, not even St.

* Heb. vi. 19.

Bernard, St. Bonaventure, St. Alphonsus, loved or venerated the B. Virgin with a love so tender, a veneration so profound, as St. Peter, St. James and St. John. They had seen the Incarnate God, and His bearing to His Blessed Mother, they were replenished with light and with love in a fulness surpassing ours, they had tasted by experience what we only believe by faith, and assuredly the fervour and depth of their love to Jesus was the measure of their love and devotion to His mother; and as they surpass us in the former, they surpass us in the latter. They lead the way far on before us, both in the devotion of the Sacred Heart and in the devotion of the Blessed Mother of God. We do but follow them, and afar off.

Now it is evident without proofs in words, that this devotion, which sprung up in the fountain of the Sacred Heart, and flowed over into the hearts of the disciples, from them was spread throughout the world. The fountain became a stream, the stream parted into many rivers and became a sea. The universal Church was inundated with the light and love of Jesus, and therefore, in proportion, of His Blessed

Mother. Wheresoever His name was heard, her name was heard likewise. If it was true of the poor woman who anointed His head, "Wheresoever the Gospel shall be preached that which this woman hath done shall be told for a memorial of her,"* how much more of her who ministered to Him the substances of His humanity? If the name Mary Magdalene was to be embalmed in the Gospel, how much more the name of His Blessed Mother? In learning the Incarnation of God, His childhood, manhood, passion, resurrection, they learned the mysteries of Nazareth, Bethlehem, Calvary, the dignity, the sorrows, the joys of His Blessed Mother.

But in learning to know the blessedness and the dignity of the Mother of Jesus, the world learned also to love her. The love of her Divine Son followed on faith in His person and His redemption. The love of His Blessed Mother followed after the love of Himself. The apostles taught those who believed, to regard her with the same love and veneration they bore to

* Such was the first propagation of the love and veneration of the Blessed Virgin throughout the Apostolic Mission.

her themselves. For it is this Godhead of Jesus which invested His Blessed Mother with a glory which no woman ever yet received. She was blessed among women because she was favoured above women. The more the world was illuminated with the knowledge and the glory of God our Saviour, the higher ascended above all creatures the blessedness and the dignity of His Mother.

But next, this devotion, though fixed in its kind and its limits, has continually unfolded itself into greater explicitness. As the glories of the Incarnation have unfolded, the glory put upon her who ministered of her substance to the Incarnate Son of God has unfolded likewise. In condemning the Gnostics, the Docetæ and the Arians, the Church declared that Mary was the mother of the co-equal Son, because she ministered to Him the substance of our humanity. The declaration of His true and substantial manhood, and His co-equal co-eternal Godhead invested her with new explicit glories. So, again, the declaration of His sole and divine personality invested her with the dignity of Mother of God. In glorifying Jesus, the

Church glorified her. It is impossible to unfold the glories of the Son, without adding new splendours to the glory of the mother. The Council of Nice and the Council of Ephesus, placed upon her head the first and the second of the three crowns of her glory. The last has been laid upon her brow in our days. From the truth of her divine maternity follows her singular and preeminent glory : preeminent because never upon any creature was laid a dignity so great as that of bearing the Incarnate God, and nurturing Him as her infant ; and singular, because the angels, Cherubim and Seraphim, are many, and many are the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and saints, but there is only one Mother of God, because only one Incarnate Son. Her dignity and glory, therefore, have no second, they are singular and alone in the heavenly court. Her throne is infinitely below God, because she is a creature, but immensely above all creatures, because she is the Mother of God.

Once more. While the declarations of the faith added more and more in the intelligence of the Church, to the explicit glory of our Blessed Mother, the gift of

piety continually enlarged the heart of the Church in the love and veneration they bear to her. The Church has four great acts of worship: two in the Holy Mass, and two in the hearts and mouths of its children; and all alike have been learned from heaven. In the Holy Mass are the "Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will;" and also the "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts;" both learned of the angels and of the Seraphim. In the hearts and mouths of its children are the "Our Father," taught to us by Jesus, and the "Hail Mary," taught by Gabriel and by St. Elizabeth. And these two last keep alive in the hearts of the faithful the spirit of adoption, the consciousness of a filial relation to God as our Father by adoption to Mary as to our mother in grace. Now the Hail Mary has been the prayer and meditation of saints. All devotion to the Mother of God springs from it, as all harmony springs from the octave. A few notes are the elements of all song, as the few words, Hail, full of grace! are the elements of all the love and veneration, the devotion and worship of the Church.

for our Blessed Mother. St. Dominic made them the measure and the melody of the Rosary of the Incarnation: St. Francis the congratulation of her seven earthly joys, St. Thomas of her seven heavenly joys, St. Philip the condolence in her seven sorrows. All through the eighteen hundred years of the Church, the Hail Mary has been pouring forth its sweetness and its variety like a long strain of endless harmony.

But it is not only in the intelligence and in the heart of the Church that the devotion to our Blessed Mother has been expanding. It has been found and felt also by experience of her power with God. The answers to prayer through her intercession, in every age of the Church, and in every state of life, and in all manner of trials, public and private, have taught the faithful that she bears an office of power and patronage over us. This experience is incommunicable to those who have not tasted it. They who are out of the unity of the Church do not believe it, because they have never made trial of it. But the whole Church is pervaded by a consciousness of her love and power now, as it was

in the beginning. We commend ourselves to her prayers now as the disciples did, after her Divine Son had ascended; and we have the accumulated testimony and experience of the Church as witness of what her prayers accomplish. But those who do not believe, cannot understand, and our experience cannot give them faith.

The third and last crown placed upon the head of the Mother of God, came from the hand of Pius the Ninth. The title Mother of God completed the dignity of her office. The Immaculate Conception completes the dignity of her person. The divine maternity is the highest glory ever laid upon a creature; the Immaculate Conception is the grace proportioned to this glory. Both in grace and in glory she is the first of creatures, for her Son is not a creature, but the Creator. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception is no more than the final analysis, both in conception and in expression, of the preeminent and singular sanctification of the Mother of God. It adds nothing but explicitness in thought and word to the illumination which showed to the apostles and their disciples the sinless sanctity of the Mother of their Lord.

They believed her to be without sin ; but if she was conceived in sin, she was not without sin. Therefore, if she was without sin, she was conceived without sin ; that is, in her conception she was sinless. And what is this but the dogma of the Immaculate Conception ? No language can be conceived more ardent or absolute than that in which the earliest records of Christianity, the liturgies and the early fathers speak of the Blessed Mother of our Lord. Spotless, sinless, thrice holy, holier than the Seraphim, holiest next after God, these are the familiar descriptions of her sanctity.

My object, then, in what I have said, is to affirm three things ; (1) first, that the Author and Founder of this devotion to the Mother of God is Jesus Himself, (2) secondly, that the chief promoters of it were the apostles and disciples of our Lord, (3) thirdly, that in nothing do we go beyond them. They believe of her Divine Maternity and of her Immaculate Sanctity all that we believe now ; they loved her and venerated her with more sensible and filial affection than we do in these chill and twilight days. I may add yet further,

that no one can be a true disciple of Jesus unless he love and venerate the Mother of Jesus, if not in the same degree, which is impossible, at least with the same affection in kind, after His divine example. The devotion we bear to the Blessed Mother, is a sign of the true Church of Jesus Christ. The absence of it is a sign fatal to those who have it not. To speak evil of the love and veneration which the Church bears to the Mother of God, must be a sign of a heart both dim and dark. It may be even a sign of reprobation; for it is certain that if we love God as we ought, if we bear to our Divine Redeemer tender and grateful hearts, if we realize the Communion of Saints and the living and loving relations which bind them to us and us to them, if we be conscious of their love to us and their prayers for us, if we have childlike hearts, lowly, loving, and filial towards our heavenly Father, then it is certain that next after Jesus, our veneration and our love will be given to her whom He loves with all the filial reverence and all tender love of His Sacred Heart.

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LETTER

ADDRESSED TO THE AUTHOR BY THE
RIGHT REV. MGR. DUPANLOUP,
BISHOP OF ORLEANS.

Madame,

Accept my most sincere thanks for the pleasure with which I have read your little book. To turn to pages pure and fresh as these, amidst all the struggles and labours to which my life is devoted, is like resting the eyes, after a long night of weariness, upon an image from which Jesus and Mary smile down upon us, surrounded by fresh flowers.

Your book is excellent, in thought, in style, in composition, in tone. I must say, that I sometimes distrust books

written in honour of the holy Mother of God. Some authors try to imagine in her what it has pleased God not to reveal to us; others hide her beautiful form under ill-chosen ornaments. There are very few pens, as there are very few pencils, which are capable of depicting, the lovely and majestic simplicity of the Mother of God and of men.

You, Madame, have succeeded in avoiding these snares. I should wish to see your book in every Christian family, in the hand of every mother and of every daughter, and, above all, on the little shelf near the crucifix, on which lie the two or three old books which form the whole library of the poor villager's cottage. It is especially for dwellers in the country that you have intended your "Month of Mary."

In the home evenings, in schools, in churches, it may serve as reading, at

once useful, safe, instructive, and touching.

I know that you do not wish your name mentioned, and that you intend to devote to the rebuilding of your Village Church the produce of the work which has cost you so much trouble. It is not thus, nor with these objects, that publications commonly come before the world. But these are merits dear to God. He has inspired the work ; He will be answerable for the success. .

With my whole heart I ask it of Him, and sincerely desire you to receive, .
Madame, the assurance of my profound respect.

✠ FELIX,

BISHOP OF ORLEANS.

INTRODUCTION.

"Hail Mary, full of grace."—St. Luke i. 28.

The Month of Mary !

For a long time past, this beautiful name has been given to the most beautiful month in the year, by the devotion of the Church and of the faithful. To-night we feel full of joy, and a secret voice seems to tell us that days of blessing are in store for us. Let us listen to this sweet voice and believe its promises, for, if we are willing, these days will indeed be days of blessing and salvation. We all are well acquainted with the seasons of the year, but few of us, perhaps, have paid much attention to what may be called the seasons of the Church.

It is beautiful and consoling to notice the order in which the traditions, feasts, and teachings of our holy religion follow

one another; to see how God has linked them to each other, and presents them to our understanding at the most favourable time, so that the touching harmony of the feasts of the Church may correspond to the impressions made upon us by the changes of the year. There is a calendar of nature, and a calendar of the Church. On Christmas-eve, when everything is buried in darkness and frost, the joyous peal of bells suddenly announces to us that a Saviour is born to us, and reminds us that the rising of the Sun of Justice has dispelled from this world darkness far thicker, and frosts far harder than those of a winter night. Lent comes with its solemn lessons, its salutary fasts, its alternations of grief and hope, at that season in which the sun and the rain, the winter winds and the spring breezes follow one another, and appear to be fighting for victory, and the labourer walks through his fields with an anxious heart, not yet knowing whether to hope or fear. At last comes the great festival of Easter, the Resurrection, and everything in nature rises from the dead, all hearts live once more to joy, and we receive at once the

hopes both of Heaven and of earth. The Ascension, the Assumption, and all the feasts which lift us up towards Heaven, are celebrated at the time of the harvest, when we are reaping the reward of our labours, when rest is coming after toil, and Heaven is open to us just as earth is enriching us with its blessings. With the roses and the bright sun comes the Corpus Christi procession to our villages. The autumn with its abundant fruits closes with that glorious feast which commemorates all the saints, and winter seems to begin while the leaves are falling upon the earth, in which repose so many of our relations and friends, whom the Church mourns with us on All-Souls day, inviting us to join with her in praying for them.

But in this beautiful correspondence of the seasons and feasts, what are the ceremonies which the Church reserves for the most cheerful season, the spring?

In the beautiful spring, when the shrubs and gardens seem to be clothed in a virginal robe of white flowers, comes the Month of Mary, the month of our mother in Heaven. There is nothing austere in its lessons, no sorrowful recollections in

its solemnities. A mother shows us her Divine Infant come down upon earth for sinners, stretching out His arms towards men, to call them, to receive them, and to comfort them—a mother who is our own mother, as well as the Mother of Jesus Christ, whose hands are always lifted up in prayer to her Son, who is God, on behalf of her children who are sinners. As there is no tenderness on earth to be compared to that of a mother, so no mother's tenderness can be compared to that of Mary. She adopted us at the foot of the cross. She accepted for us the sword of sorrow which pierced her soul, and though sinners have been the cause of all her sufferings on earth, yet never was it known that a sinner invoked her in vain. To the happy she teaches the secret of holy joys, in which God has the first place; to the unhappy, submission and hope. High and low, rich and poor, saints and penitents, happy and sorrowful, find hope, mercy, and peace at the feet of this mother who loves them all with an equal love.

Let us, then, hail the return of the Month of Mary with a holy joy and a

filial hope. Let us listen to the secret voice which speaks to our hearts. Let us open the door to Jesus who desires to enter with His Mother. He Himself says to us with His sweet voice: "*Behold I stand at the door and knock.*"

And once more, how well chosen is the season for a time of restoration and joy. The labourer has just passed long months in his poor dwelling; during the winter, all that he had sown in the autumn, remained buried as it were, in a winding-sheet of snow. In the long evenings when the cold wind blew, and the rain beat against the window, he would sorrowfully say, that no work could be done next day, and perhaps not for several days, and he anxiously looked forward to a better season. And now it is come. The sun is shining, and the crops are ripening in the fields, promising a good harvest as the reward of his labours; and now, as he begins his hard day's work, he has the songs of the birds to gladden his ears, and the blossoming shrubs to rejoice his eyes. To whom ought the best part of these days which God has made so beautiful and so bright, to be given? Shall we not

begin them by a prayer? In Catholic lands, the labourer as he goes to his work hears the Angelus bell ring from the village church; it suggests a thought of prayer and hope as his work begins. What is sweeter for a child than to begin the day by greeting his mother? And as the day brings new work and fresh troubles, what can be better than to ask for the necessary strength through her sweet intercession? Every hour of the day, every day of the year, and every age of life, brings with it this continual want, this precious duty of prayer, which is our best support and consolation.

Prayer varies according to our circumstances and wants. God gives it at each season the particular graces which our souls need. It prepares, strengthens, or comforts us. Let us then learn to understand and seek for these particular graces. Each time that a new spring brings us the beautiful Month of Mary, let us love it as we love the sound of the Angelus-bell. As our holy mother calls us to prayer the first thing in the morning, so also does she call upon us to consecrate the first month of the spring to her ser-

vice, calling it by her name. The young year offers to Mary its first flowers and its first songs of joy. Let us join in this canticle of hope, of prayer, and of love, and now let all living things lift up their voices to the throne of our merciful patroness.

We have much to ask of her, and therefore we ought to pray much. Let our hearts be like the fertile soil, in which holy affections and good thoughts grow and increase daily, as the good seed grows in the fields.

Our Saviour, who, while He was upon earth, loved humble country life, and drew some of His most touching parables from things with which we are every day occupied, compared Himself to a sower going out into the fields and sowing good seed.

Now the Gospel tells us, that while he sowed, part of the seed fell by the way side, and the birds of the air eat it up. And other some fell upon stony ground, and shot up immediately.....and when the sun was risen, it was scorched, and because it had no root, it withered away.

And some fell among thorns; and the

thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

And some fell upon good ground, and brought forth fruit that grew up, and increased and yielded, one thirty, another sixty, and another a hundred.

And our Lord said : “ *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*”

Let us also listen to this parable. Our Saviour Himself expounds it to us. The seed which He came Himself to sow, is His Divine Word. The high way on which the good seed fell, and became the food of the birds, is the careless heart on which everything passes backwards and forwards, and no good thought remains, in which holy instructions are unattended to, and in which the devil, who often travels by this road which he finds open to him, comes and takes away the good seed before it has time to shoot.

The thin and stony soil in which the good seed grows up only to die under the midday sun, is the weak and ill-prepared heart which hears the Word of God without having sought it, and which receives it at first with joy, because it is consoling and sweet, but which is incapable of any

deep impression, of any effort to make it take root and grow. At the first trouble, at the first temptation, at the first jeer of the wicked, the good seed but just sprung up withers on the stalk, because it had no roots.

As for the thorns, we all know how quickly they grow up in good soil, if it is not cultivated. Thus, when our Lord speaks of the good seed choked by the thorns, which grew up with it, He points out to us the heart which might be good, if worldly and carnal desires, pleasures, and hatreds did not usurp the place which ought to be held by the love of God. How can the good seed flourish and bear fruits, when there are so many weeds growing that there is no room left for it? With a little labour, this soil which God had created fertile, might have produced a beautiful harvest.

Lastly, the good soil is the faithful heart which receives the good seed, and it alone, destroying by constant labour all the weeds, that is to say, evil inclinations, which, without great watchfulness, grow up in the frail heart of man as quickly as the weeds which are rooted up in the

fields. Then the fertile and loose soil of the Christian heart allows the roots of this seed of salvation to strike deep. There it is nourished by constant good will, by holy desires, and by generous sacrifices, whilst grace comes down like dew from Heaven, to make it grow up and ripen.

What must we do to make our souls like this fertile soil? What must we do, that the divine seed may bring forth thirty, sixty, a hundred-fold? Let us cultivate our souls, which our dear Master so often calls in His Gospel, the field of the householder, with the same care and toil with which a diligent farmer prepares the ground for his seed. All the good which is in any of us, is the seed which God has sown by His grace. The beautiful Month of Mary, with its holy lessons and joys, will produce this blessed harvest in our souls, as its bright sun and warm dews make the seeds which are now lying hidden in our fields shoot forth and ripen. If there be one of us whose heart is like the stony soil choked with thorns, there is still time, let us root out all that is evil, and cultivate this ground, which, if we set about it in earnest, we can, by the grace

of God, still make fruitful. Let us now prepare the ground, the time for sowing, for a heavenly harvest is never gone by. These are the days of renewal, the Divine Sower is here. Let us receive with reverence, and cultivate with zeal the good seed which He gives us, and before the end of the year, these late sowings will bear an abundant harvest.

FIRST DAY.

MIRROR OF JUSTICE,

Pray for us.

There is no better way of sanctifying this beautiful month, and of gathering all its holy lessons, than to fix our eyes constantly and faithfully on our mother during these days of mercy. She it is who is to speak to us, her prayers will obtain for us the grace to understand her. By studying what was her life on earth, we shall understand what ours ought to be.

Let us not fear to follow an example so far above us. Let us not measure with alarm, the distance between our nothingness and her glory. Let us not say to ourselves, "How can I, a poor creature, imitate her who was so perfect as to merit to become the Mother of God?" This spotless life, which has been for so many centuries the subject of the meditations of the Saints and the admiration of Heaven and of earth, is, at the same time, the most

humble and hidden of lives, the poorest and most suffering, the simplest and the one most like our own. It is super-human and heroic, only because it is perfect in each detail. Though her life is more exalted than that of any Saint, it is not, with the exception of the prodigy of her divine maternity, that it contains more extraordinary actions, or more striking miracles. We do not even see in it, the wonders that are seen in the lives of many Saints, so completely is it veiled by humility. But what raises her's above all other human lives, is the fact, that it is uniformly wonderful and holy from birth until death, whereas, in the Lives of the Saints, so long as they are on earth, we see striking virtues mingled with imperfections and faults.

Is there one of us who can render this testimony to himself, that his life is uniformly consistent? One corner of a field is sometimes luxuriant, while the rest is thin and bare. This is our own history; good parts and many bare places. We shall never find this in the Life of the Blessed Virgin. Her life is as simple and humble as that of the simplest and mean-

est amongst us, but it is perfect; and, whereas in the life of the best of us, there is not a day in which a close observer might not find more than one fault, the more we contemplate the Life of our holy Mother, the greater are the treasures of grace and virtue which we there discover.

Ought we then to be discouraged at the sight of her perfection, and because we cannot possess the whole treasure, shall we give up gaining even a small part of it? This would indeed be foolish. Let us look closely at the Life of our Mother. If we fix our eyes upon any one of those virtues which shine forth so gloriously in her, does it not seem to be within the reach of each one of us? Love of God, obedience, deep humility, labour, generous and contented poverty, such was her life, and such should be ours also. Our poor human nature will doubtless often fail, where this privileged creature never even faltered, for, although our original sin has been cleansed by baptism, we are still like convalescents, cured by the grace of God of a terrible disease, but left weak and liable to fall. Exempt from this infirmity, and always faithful to grace, the Blessed

Virgin pressed on towards God with an untiring strength, which we can never know. But we can follow her at a distance; we can love and obey God, humble ourselves, keep up our courage in labour, and preserve our peace in suffering, if not like her, at least, strengthening ourselves by her example; and if we fall, where she never faltered, we can rise quickly, and quicken our pace in order to regain lost ground. It was by the superhuman and perfect practice of virtues, humble in the eyes of the world, that she attained to so high a pitch of glory. As she tells us, in her beautiful canticle, it was the humility of His handmaid which the Lord regarded, and on account of which, all generations shall call her blessed. And we also, by practising these same virtues, to the utmost of our power, can attain to everlasting happiness and glory. We shall find rest after our labour in the kingdom of God, far below our mother, but at the foot of her throne, and we shall rejoice for ever in her presence, and in that of her Son.

Let us, then, study this holy life, which should be our model, and when we see

that our Divine Saviour and His holy Mother were pleased to share our hardest labours, and in the midst of troubles and fatigues, far greater than ours, to fulfil all the duties of the humble life they had chosen for themselves, we shall learn to reverence the duties of our life, and shall understand that it depends upon ourselves, to make them the means of our salvation. We shall learn the secret of that virtue, which at once ennobles and lessens suffering; free and willing acceptance of all trials, for God's sake. Who ever practised it more perfectly than Mary? She, the daughter of kings, united herself to the lowly Joseph, like her, a descendant of David, like her, poor and happy in his poverty. She laboured with him, and like the wives and daughters of the poor, she had her hard share of a hard life. When the time came, that God revealed to her her high destiny, with the same humility she accepted this glory, which raised her above all other women, and made all generations call her blessed. "*Behold,*" said she, "*the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to Thy word.*" She took a sublime part in the work of our

redemption, she also participated in all the sufferings by which our Divine Saviour obtained our salvation. Behold her, some hours before the birth of her Divine Son, passing through the streets of Bethlehem with Joseph, overcome by fatigue, asking from door to door a shelter, which is everywhere refused to her. With what meekness she bore her sufferings and this unkind reception !

When a stable became the first sanctuary of the Son of God upon earth, see how she worshipped Him in His poverty ; receiving in a like spirit the homage of the shepherds and of the eastern kings ! When, according to custom, she went up to the temple to offer her beloved Son to God, the holy and aged Simeon took the Divine Child into his arms and proclaimed Him the salvation of Israel, then cast upon the kneeling mother a look full of reverence and compassion, and announced to her, that her Son would be a sign to be contradicted by men, and that a sword of sorrow would pierce her own soul. This holy daughter of Israel, who daily devoted herself to the meditation of the sacred books of her people, read in the words of

the prophets the long list of her own sorrows and of the sufferings of her Son. Was there a sound of murmuring or complaint in her spotless soul? No; she bowed her head as on the day of her Annunciation, and again the Mother of God said in her heart, "*Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to Thy word.*"

Throughout the life of Mary in the Gospel, wherever the veil of humility which covers it is raised, we see this willing *acceptance*, which gave her so large a share in the sufferings of the Passion, and merits for her so much love and gratitude from us, since she has suffered all for us. We see it stronger and more generous than ever at the foot of the Cross, where Mary stood and bore for us that dreadful suffering which every mother's heart will enter into; where she surpassed in courage all other mothers, in adopting as her children those whose sins had just caused the death of her Son. Lastly, we see her accept, for the love of us and the good of the infant Church, the grief of surviving her Son, until, the measure of her merits being filled up, the heavens opened to

receive her, and the Angels bore their Queen to the feet of the Father, whose chosen creature she is, of the Son whose Mother she is, of the Holy Ghost whose Spouse she is.

If Mary accepted all, what is there which we will not accept? We who have deserved every trouble which God in His mercy sends us, have we not justice enough in our hearts to weigh in an even balance our guilty lives and Mary's spotless life, and to blush to see how far are the sufferings of which we complain, from equalling those accepted by her without a murmur? There are many different paths leading to that beautiful Heaven, which is our true home, some are rough and hard to climb, others there are, easier in appearance, but we cannot see their windings, and they may be beset with many changes and many sufferings. Let us walk boldly in the path in which our heavenly Father, who knows our need and the measure of our grace, has directed our first steps. Let us not turn back to seek an easier path, we shall lose our time and trouble. Above all, let us not stop to cast an envious look on him who ascends by

another side of the mountain. Let us learn that no human creature has ever trodden any of these paths without fatigue and peril, and that the steepest is sometimes the shortest and the best. Let us lift our heads and look, not at the rough path, but at the Heaven to which it leads. Mary, the morning star, will comfort and guide us by her pure light. Mary, the gate of Heaven, will help us to reach the goal, where each one of our sufferings will be rewarded a hundred-fold.

Prayer.

Hail! thou our Queen and our model!
Hail! thou who hast suffered more than we!
Hail! thou who rememberest thine own sorrows, only in order to pity those who suffer with an exceeding compassion.
Hail, O Mother of Mercy! To thee we poor sons of Eve, exiled so far from Heaven, send up our cries and sighs, weeping and mourning, in this vale of tears. We beseech thee, our advocate, turn on us those merciful eyes of thine, which have known tears only the better to understand those which we shed. Help us as we painfully

climb the steep ascent. Help us to reach the heights on which we shall find God. And when we have left far behind us the exile of this world, show us for evermore our sweet Saviour Jesus, the blessed fruit of thy womb.

Resolution.

Often to compare our sufferings with those of the Blessed Virgin; to suffer and accept all patiently, after her example.

SECOND DAY.

THE UNIVERSAL EXPECTATION OF THE
SAVIOUR.

“And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root.”—Is. xi. 1.

All Christians know that God created our first parents, Adam and Eve, innocent and happy; that He gave them that liberty without which their homage and obedience would have had no merit; that the devil, the first creature who revolted against his Creator, envied their happiness and tempted and ruined them; and that, fallen from the sovereignty over the creation which God had given them, they were expelled from the terrestrial paradise, and condemned to labour, suffering, and death. We are all the children of these two exiles, who lived in sorrow upon the earth, which was smitten with a curse. All the millions of men now scattered over the earth are the children of one

family, and science as well as faith, tracing its way back through the obscurity of so many centuries, to the very source of this immense family, leads us back to the same origin.

Now, daily experience shows us, that in a family, honour or shame, health or sickness, features, and sometimes the most delicate shades of character are carried down from father to son, from ancestor to descendant. In the world the innocent child bears the stain of the fault which he has not committed; and a father would never consent to give his daughter in marriage to the son of a criminal, for, besides the shame, he would fear that the father's crime might run, like poison, in the veins of the son. This human law is just, though severe. Do we not experience at the bottom of our hearts, this feeling of partaking both in the honour and shame of any member of our family, village, or country? Have not our hearts beat at the news of a victory, or at the remembrance of one of the glories of our country? When a man has nobly done his duty, and the public voice brings his name to the ears of his countrymen, how

proud and happy they are ! His family is surrounded by a crowd of friends anxious to partake its joy. Or if a man has disgraced himself, his friends and family share his shame. How grievous is the sorrow of any family if one of its members commits some infamous action : if he comes to the scaffold, what shame for his brothers, sisters, and all his relations ; solitude closes round them, the best-intentioned speak low as they pass, and others point the finger at them. In order to regain their reputation, lost through no fault of theirs, they have to spend a life of labour and courage, for man does not easily forgive ; and, besides, though the son of a criminal may, through God's grace, grow up an honest man, yet there is no doubt that the father's crime is a continual injury to the son.

But if we, sinners as we are, judge so severely those who, after all, are only a little worse than ourselves, if we reject their society, and shudder at the idea of an alliance with them, can we not understand how justly God, who is holiness itself, repulsed a creature, made after His

image, to love and serve Him, who had revolted against the end of its existence ?

As the victory of Adam over the devil would have been our glory, so his disgraceful defeat is our ignominy ; and as children of a great criminal, we have in our veins a secret poison which inclines us to sin, as our father has sinned.

There is, however, a great difference between the justice of God and the justice of man ; for with God, pardon and hope are always side by side with punishment. "*When Thou art angry, Lord,*" says a prophet, "*Thou wilt remember mercy.*" (Habac. iii.) It is at the very first moment of our condemnation that we find the first proof of this truth. When Eve, bowed down under the weight of Divine anger, accused the devil who had deceived her, God pronounced a curse upon him, saying, "*I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed : she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel.*" And behold, the guilty woman, through whom the tempter had just succeeded in bringing sin and death into the world, saw through her tears, in the distant future,

which the light of God made clear to her, a woman through whom salvation was to come, triumphing over the serpent. Whilst punishing Eve God promised Mary.

It was with this hope that our first parents went into the land of exile, that they cleared away the thorns and thistles in the sweat of their brow, and that they endured the horrible grief of seeing the consequences of their sin shew themselves in their children; crime in Cain, death in Abel. It was this hope which enabled Adam to endure life during nine hundred years, and which taught the children of Seth, his youngest son, to resign themselves and to wait as he did. Generation succeeded generation, and the children of Seth were mixed up with the children of Cain, the murderer of his brother. But God placed the treasure of His promise in a chosen family, and when His justice covered the earth with the avenging waters of the deluge, Noe saved the human race in the ark, and preserved the hope of the Redeemer.

Then, as Noe's family became extended, and began to repopulate the earth, the germ of evil reappeared in the descendants of

those good men whom God had spared. Darkness was spread over the earth, and the true light remained only in the hearts of a small number. Then God chose from amongst them a man destined to become the father of a people, in which the deposit of truth should be preserved for centuries, and in the midst of all human errors. *“And God said to Abraham: Go forth out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and out of thy father’s house, and come into the land which I will show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation,and I will bless them that bless thee, curse them that curse thee, and in thee shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.”* Abraham obeyed the word of God. He was obedient all his life with an heroic fidelity, separating himself from the rest of men by that docility which is the mark of the elect. He is ready to sacrifice to the Lord even his son, the pledge of His promises. Then God stays his arm, restores to him his son, and renews His promises, and the covenant passes from the faithful father to the son. *I will multiply thy seed like the stars of heaven,* said God to Isaac, *and I will give*

to thy posterity all these countries ; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.

The family which was to become the people of God increased. They lived neither in houses nor in towns, but travelled about feeding their flocks. The patriarch or father was the chief whom all obeyed. His life, though shorter than that of Adam and his first sons, was, nevertheless, far longer than ours, in order that the old man, who had seen so many things happen for more than a century, might instruct the generations which sprung up around him like the young shoots round a great tree. After the death of the patriarch, God renewed the promise directly to his son. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, received it each in turn in the same form of words. *I will multiply thy seed like the stars of heaven, and like the dust of the earth : in thee and in thy race shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.*

Now this blessing is the Redeemer, who was to be born of this chosen race, and to save all men. As time goes on, we see this promise unfold itself more clearly. Jacob is led into Egypt through the won-

derful fortunes of his son Joseph, the saviour of his brethren, who had betrayed him, a touching figure of Jesus Christ. The patriarch dies surrounded by his twelve sons, who are about to form, in the midst of the idolatry of Egypt, the twelve tribes of the people of God. Enlightened on his deathbed by Divine inspiration, he points out which of his sons is to become the father of the royal race out of which would come the Saviour. *Juda, thee shall thy brethren praise.....the sons of thy father shall bow down to thee.....The sceptre shall not be taken away from Juda, nor a ruler from his thigh, till He come that is to be sent, and He shall be the expectation of nations.*

The growing prosperity of the children of Israel alarmed the Egyptians. A terrible persecution rose against them; but in vain did they load them with work, and reduce them to the most cruel slavery, the Hand of God protected them. In vain were their new-born children exposed on the waters of the Nile: God guided the frail cradle which bore the liberator of His people; He moved with pity the daughter of the persecutor himself, and

the child who was saved from the waters became Moses, the greatest of His servants.

We all know by what wonders God delivered His people from the slavery of Egypt, and led them through the desert. Too often evil appears amongst the children of Israel: they murmur ungratefully at the fatigues of the journey, and they return to the idols of Egypt. But God is with them: His Fatherly Hand guides them, His justice punishes them, His mercy pardons them.

On the summit of Mount Sinai Moses receives from His mouth the written law, which confirms and fixes for ever the primitive law, which up to this time had been transmitted from the patriarchs to their sons. Moses renews in God's name the promise upon which all their hopes had been founded, and in the first pages of the sacred book in which he records by the inspiration of God the history of His people, the promise of the Redeemer is inscribed close to the condemnation.

After forty years passed in the desert as a punishment for their ingratitude, the people of God entered at last into the pro-

mised land. There they are established by miracles, and the Hand of God is heavy upon their enemies. When they fall again into error the Hand of God is withdrawn from them, and their enemies become strong. When they return to God in slavery and sorrow, the Lord remembers His promises, and sends them a strong man who saves them. Their misfortunes infallibly follow their sins, their victories follow their repentance. Hoping to be defended against the reverses which they brought upon themselves, they ask for a king. Saul, chosen by God, and victorious so long as he is faithful, is abandoned when he disobeys, and perishes miserably. Then comes David, the great servant of God, the glorious king of the race of Juda, whose house shall keep the sceptre till He shall come who is to be sent. God gave to him the gift of prophecy. He saw beforehand the glories and the misfortunes of his people, but above all he saw with a clearness before unknown the promised Saviour, whom he calls at the same time his Lord and his Son.

After him, and until the end, we find

the same vicissitudes of good and evil, of mercy and chastisement. God raises up prophets to call His people to repentance, or to renew their hopes. Their words were carefully preserved and added to the books of Moses, and to those of the Kings, which were written by the inspiration of God; and as we read these Holy Scriptures we find in each page the promise of the expected Saviour. It is wonderful, as the ages advance, to see how this Divine Figure is gradually completed. Each prophet adds a feature, and at the same time the figure of that blessed woman promised to Eve appears from the shades of the picture. "A virgin," says Isaias, "shall conceive and bear a Son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel, which, being interpreted, is God with us."* The purest and most touching images are used to paint the Mother of the Saviour. She is the rod of Jesse, from which a flower shall rise up.† She is the rising morning;‡ she is the lily among thorns.§ The Jewish people; amidst all their ingratitude, retain this belief. When they are led captive

* Is. vii. 14.

† Is. xl. 1.

‡ Cant. vi. 9.

§ Cant. ii. 2.

into the land of enemies charged to execute the vengeance of the just God whom they have offended, this hope follows them, and comforts them in the land of exile. When at last strangers reign over fallen Israel, for the punishment of its faults, it is again their strength and consolation in servitude. But this hope is mingled with many errors. Ungrateful in prosperity, the children of Israel weep and pray in the day of retribution. Supported by the recollections of the past, they know that the mercy of God is greater than their crimes, and they have a hope. But what is it? A powerful king, a warrior who will crush their enemies, and raise Jerusalem from its ruins. In vain the prophets describe to them the Man of Sorrows, the humble and resigned Victim who is to suffer and die for their salvation: their eyes are closed by excessive pride.

However, they suffer and they wait. The race of David, though deprived of its throne, and oppressed like the rest, is still the royal race, honoured above all others, not so much for its past as for its future greatness. From it is to come the Desired

of all Nations: they know and believe this. Daniel has told them the year of His birth, and the time draws near. There is not a maiden of the royal house who does not daily beseech the Lord that the rod from the root of Jesse, the blessed virgin who is to be the Mother of the Saviour, may spring up from among her own children, and the woman whom God has deprived of the happiness of being a mother weeps in silence and humiliation. She is looked upon with contempt, as a barren branch on the tree which is to bear the precious fruit expected by all generations.

Lively, however, as is this expectation of the Saviour among the people of God, it is not confined to the narrow space of Judea. We shall find it amongst the idolatrous nations, and in spite of the darkness which surrounds it, we shall admire the providence of God which has caused this fragment of His promises to be cherished from age to age, amidst so many errors. Throughout the vast expanse of the universe there is but one small nation in which He is known and served, and even there how often does error and infidelity break in. All the rest

of mankind live in ignorance of God, and a contempt of the law, of which a Christian can hardly form an idea. Of old the knowledge of the true God had been transmitted from father to son, from one faithful heart to another. But now it became more and more corrupted as each generation passed on. The parents turned away from God, the children were brought up in ignorance of Him, each generation became more miserable than the last.

As no intelligent creature can live without worshipping a Superior Being, these poor blinded people made gods for themselves. Some, giving to creatures the homage due to the Creator, worshipped the sun which ripened their harvests, the moon and the stars which enlightened their nights. Others, still more foolish, made coarse likenesses of the Godhead, and, making gods as numerous as the attributes which they supposed Him to possess, they worshipped idols of wood or of stone, representing strength, power, fertility, vengeance, and the like. Others even (see what folly the human mind can reach when abandoned by God's light,) others went so far as to worship all the

passions and vices under the names of gods, whom any of us would be ashamed to resemble. And then, what disorder, what a chaos of war and revenge, what a shock of conflicting passions, what oppression of the weak by the strong! O we little know from what Christianity has delivered us!

Nevertheless, through this deluge of errors and crimes there are some scattered truths floating like the remains of a great storm, and which are found amongst nations least resembling each other, as a proof of their common origin. There is one especially, which is found all over the earth, the expectation of a Redeemer. Man might forget or deny the true God, but he could not deny the grief which was crushing him; he could not refuse to himself the hope of something better to come. Therefore we recognize it wherever we go; the mind, wearied with the absurd errors of paganism, is enlightened by the sudden apparition of this truth. It is a light which strikes the sight and rejoices it, like that friendly light shining from afar, which points out to the villager his home as he returns through the fields

some winter evening, and this hope becomes stronger and more likely as the time approaches appointed by God for the coming of the Saviour. When the time is accomplished the general expectation becomes impatient and restless.

All nations, whether barbarous or civilized, are agitated. From their forests, from their deserts, or from their towns, they turn their eyes towards one spot, for they all know pretty nearly from which side of the earth the Saviour is to come.

At this time the great city of Rome, after long and terrible wars, had made itself mistress of all known nations. God had permitted the establishment of this power, the most formidable which had ever ruled the world, for He designed great things for Rome. It was His will that it should become the place where all nations should assemble, and the centre of the world, so that the Gospel, having penetrated it, might be easily extended to the ends of the earth. He willed yet more, that this city, which then held all nations in subjection by its warlike power, should one day reign over the world through meekness and peace, although

unarmed, despoiled, nearly destroyed, and without any other power than the word of God ; in a word, that it should become the centre of the Christian Church, the dwelling-place of the Pope, the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth, the seat of the holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church, of which we are all children. But at the time of which I am speaking, Rome was all pagan. It was the metropolis of paganism, as it was to become the metropolis of Christianity. All the gods of all nations had their temples in the city, except the true God.

And Rome itself was in expectation. Heathen poets announced in mysterious language both the Infant Saviour and the Virgin His Mother. It is related that one day the powerful Emperor Augustus, who reigned at this time at Rome, being troubled in his mind by a prediction of this kind, was going to the temple to consult the greatest of his false gods, when he saw in the clouds, over the temple itself, an altar, on which was standing a young woman beaming with divine purity, and holding an Infant in her arms. In fact, Mary and the Infant Jesus were soon

about to dethrone, on this very spot, Jupiter, the king of the false gods. On the ruins of his temple now stands a beautiful church, dedicated to our Saviour and His Mother, and it is called the "Altar of Heaven" (*Ara Cœli*) in memory of the vision of Augustus.

Thus we see how God, in His eternal Providence, had prepared for the coming of His Son. All these marks of a common hope appearing amongst such different nations announced the coming of the Saviour, as the first buds announce the coming of spring. In the frightful state in which the world then was, there rose up from the earth towards heaven an immense concert of lamentations and prayers. All these voices of woe seemed to utter those beautiful words which the Church sings during Advent: "*Rorate, cœli, desuper et nubes pluant justum.*"*

Let us who have had the blessing of being born in the light of the Gospel, often turn our eyes towards the past, in order to understand all that we owe to God. Let us sum up, that we may always

* "*Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the just.*"—*Ord.*

remember it, the history of man from the creation to the Redemption. One origin, one fall, one promise, one family from which springs the whole human race, the separation which exists even in this family between the good and the bad : then on one side the people of God preserved from age to age, wavering often, but always upheld by the Divine mercy, and preserving the inheritance of the promise ; on the other side, the heathen world separated from God, at first through their own fault, then through an incurable blindness, slaves of every passion, skilled in every crime, but enduring inexpressible sufferings, and preserving none of the truth except the hope of deliverance. As all the nations of the earth have a common origin, so there is but one deliverance for all the griefs of humanity, of which Adam's sin is the common source. In ancient France, the cry on days of victory and rejoicing, was 'Noël !' which means 'Christmas !' and this one cry expressed every joy. 'Christmas !' is also the cry of the rescued race of man, and all their hopes have their starting-point at the cradle of the Saviour.

The proof is evident. To form an idea of the barbarity of idolatrous times, we have only to glance from afar to those unhappy lands on which the light of God has never shone. At the present time more than half the earth is buried in this darkness, from which Christianity alone has delivered us. Asia, and nearly the whole of Africa, are ignorant of the law of God, and all the horrors of which I have just spoken, the oppression of the weak by the strong, and barbarous selfishness, reign as powerfully in those lands as they reigned over the whole earth before the coming of the Saviour. At the present time there are countries in which the women are in a state of degradation and servitude which makes us blush for shame, in which men almost admit that their mothers and sisters have no souls. What, then, if we speak of those great empires of China and Cochin-china, in which for centuries past so many holy martyrs have shed their blood, in which millions of Christians were pursued, tortured, and torn in pieces, till brave Christian soldiers from Europe made idolatry tremble on its throne only a few years ago? What,

then, if we speak of those wild regions of Africa, where the men are organised into classes, and sold like brutes, or killed by hundreds, either by sacrificing them with dreadful tortures to a deified serpent, or by strangling them to enliven a festivity, or to accompany into the next world the soul of some chief. This is what goes on even in our days in countries where the kingdom of God is unknown. And, no doubt, the same or other like horrors would exist among us if the kingdom of God was no longer among us. Let us prostrate ourselves, therefore, before Him who has delivered us from this darkness, without any merit of ours. Let us love and serve with all our hearts the Divine Saviour who has redeemed us. Let us bless Him all the days of our life. Let us bless also the Immaculate Mother who gave Him to the world, and whose hands are always stretched out towards Him, to turn away from this too ungrateful world the scourges which would fall upon it, if it was abandoned for a single day by its Saviour and its Deliverer.

Prayer.

O holy Mother of our Saviour! remember us continually during these days which belong to thee, and which are the happiness of the children of God, and the misery of those who know Him not, or who abandon Him. Of what shall we complain, now that the Lord has made us heirs of His kingdom? What matter though the road be difficult, if the splendid horizon of our heavenly country appears without ceasing to encourage and strengthen us? Stretch out thine arms, O Mother, towards us; shew thyself to us at the end of the journey, then, when we shall have marched courageously until the end, receive thy wearied children, present them to thy Divine Son, their Saviour and their hope, and may His kingdom, which they have sought on earth, become their reward in heaven. Amen.

Practice.

Never to pass a day without thanking God for having made us Christians.

THIRD DAY.

THE FIRST YEARS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN'S LIFE.

“Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising?”—Cant. vi. 9.

This evening, with the help of God, we are going to begin the account of Mary's holy life. Let us study it with devotion, and let us ask for grace to discover and to love the lessons it contains.

In a certain province of the land of Judea, which had formerly been given by God to His own people, but which was now delivered up to the dominion of foreign masters, in punishment for the sins of the chosen people, at Nazareth, a little town of Galilee, lived in the fear of God a wedded pair named Joachim and Anna. They were of the royal race of David. They had served God faithfully throughout a long life, and now they saw with sadness the approach of old age, for the joy of seeing their lives renewed in

their children had not been granted to them. This holy couple bore in humble obedience both the solitude of their home and the shame which the general belief of the Jews cast on the sterility of their union. This grief, borne with patience, prepared them for the greatest grace that God had ever granted to a human creature. It was under this solitary and despised roof that the new shoot from the stem of Jesse was about to blossom, that the Blessed Virgin, so long promised and expected, was to be born. A pious tradition relates that an angel of the Lord appeared, first to Joachim and then to Anna, to announce to them the Child whose coming was to turn their solitude into joy.

Mary, the most pure Virgin, was conceived without sin. No spot came near her whom the angels already hailed as their Queen. Anna, as humble in joy as in sorrow, received her beloved daughter into her arms, gave her the sweet name of Mary, which is said to signify Star of the Sea, and from this moment her whole life was devoted to this child of benediction, whom new graces made daily more beau-

tiful. She nourished her with her milk, day and night she tended her. How must she have loved this child, so long desired, and obtained from God by so many prayers and tears! With what love must she have bent her grey hairs and aged countenance over this young and lovely child! How must her heart have beat for joy when she showed those who had so long despised her that God had at length had pity on His servant! But were they merely human feelings of tenderness which the sight of her daughter awakened in the heart of the holy Anna? No; whilst she pressed her to her bosom with all a mother's love, she felt deep in her soul the reverence she owed to this spotless creature. She knew that God had given her her child, not for herself, but as a sacred trust, for which she would have to answer. She knew that God, in His goodness, had preserved her child from all stain, but she knew also that it was her duty to cultivate and render fruitful the wonderful seeds which He had implanted in this young soul. The first word which Mary heard from her mother's lips was the holy name of God. The first affec-

tions of her heart were directed towards Him. Joachim shared the cares of his holy spouse, and the angels in heaven must have rejoiced at the sight of this blessed family. Let us often think of the cradle of Mary, of this humble dwelling from whence prayer rose as a sweet-smelling incense, towards heaven, and in which the innocence of the holy child shone with such pure radiance.

Anna and Joachim lived for her alone; but their generous love offered her daily to the Lord, and they prepared to accomplish the sacrifice by separating themselves from their beloved daughter. Often, says a pious legend, did Joachim remind Anna of the promise they had made to God of offering their child to Him, that she might be brought up in the temple with the maidens consecrated to the Lord.

When the time came the holy Anna had not a thought of keeping her treasure to herself. On a certain day a beautiful procession was seen outside the dwelling of the holy pair. The young maidens of the tribe, in festal robes, and bearing lighted lamps, came to fetch her who was one day to be called the Queen of Virgins.

Joachim and Anna left their home, taking with them their child, and though tears flowed from their eyes, their hearts, raised above earthly regrets, praised God in a canticle of love and gratitude. They reached Jerusalem, and without delay, with their feet still covered with the dust of the journey, they presented themselves at the portico of the temple. It is said that Mary here left her mother's arms, and mounted the steps of the temple alone, and with unfaltering footsteps, no longer needing the support of the hand which up to this time had guided all her steps. "Joachim and Anna watched her advancing towards the tabernacle of the Lord, and their eyes were wet with tears."

But they offered their only treasure to God with a good will. Mary was received by the high priest, and led into the midst of the young maidens brought up in the temple. Anna and Joachim offered a sacrifice to God and then departed, returning slowly towards their solitary home, leaving behind them her who had made its joy, but preserving in their hearts that happiness in sacrifice, that peace in

the midst of sorrow, which reward and strengthen faithful souls.

Let us pause here. This is the first chapter of our history. Let us kneel by Mary's cradle, and receive from the child, and from her holy mother, the first lessons which this account should teach us. It has examples for all ages, for every position in life. Has not the interior of this holy house, the sight of which made the angels rejoice, many lessons for us? Have not many of us, like Joachim and Anna, received from God a sacred trust, of which we must one day render account? Have not many of us, like them, little innocent beings to bring up for Him? Our children, doubtless, have not, like the spotless Virgin, been preserved from the stain of original sin; but the Blood of Jesus Christ was shed for them, the holy waters of baptism have flowed on their brow, have washed away that stain, and have replaced it by the eternal sign of salvation. They are children of God; they have an immortal soul; and to us this soul is confided, that our love may cultivate the blessed seeds which God has implanted in it.

There is not any mother who does not love her child, who would not give her life for it; but in spite of this are they all faithful to the holy mission they have received from God? It is not a virtue to love one's child; it is an almost involuntary instinct of the heart; it is an instinct which God has planted in every creature. Do we not see, even among animals, that the mother loves her young, and gives it the food of which she deprives herself? Do not even the most timid become fierce in defence of their young? The poor frightened hen gathers her chickens under her wings, bristles up her feathers, and with open beak and eye gleaming with anger, threatens from afar the enemy who approaches her brood. We love our children by an irresistible instinct, but to love them for God is a real virtue. To bring them up for God is the wonderful and fruitful work in which we recognize the intelligent being, the Christian father and mother, faithful to their holy mission. No one, unless he be a Christian, can consider his child as a sacred trust received from God, and keeping this thought con-

stantly before his eyes, banish from his love all selfishness and weakness.

We were speaking just now of the reverence of St. Anne for the child whose high destiny she foresaw. But is there any Christian mother who ought not to feel for her child a reverence almost as great? She knows that this child, who sleeps in her arms, this frail creature who lives only by her care and love, can one day gain a seat in the glorious assembly of the saints. The brow on which her lips are pressed may be encircled with the glory of the elect! And to whom, next to God, will he owe such glory and happiness? To his mother, who nourished and educated in him the life of the soul, as well as giving him the life of the body. Yes, it is for her, a poor creature, suffering and weeping, in this miserable life, as her son will one day suffer and weep, it is for her to place her son on the road to heaven. It is from her mouth that he will receive those early lessons which he will never forget. No words can express all a mother can do for the eternal happiness or misery of her children. The first lessons they receive on her knee will have

the greatest influence over their whole lives. God has placed in her arms a child cleansed from original sin by baptism; he is innocent and pure as an angel. She must take heed to preserve without stain the child whom God has given her. The first words which strike his ear, even before he can understand them, must be good words. The first actions which strike his eyes, as soon as his understanding awakens, must be good actions. She must reverence him as the holy Anne revered the infant Mary. It is told in the life of a celebrated doctor of the Church, that his father knelt at night by the cradle in which his son was sleeping, looked long upon him with holy emotion, and then, uncovering the breast of the child, he kissed it with reverence, as the temple in which God loved to dwell, because of the purity of infancy. We must reverence our children! We ourselves shall gain by it, and whilst our love will preserve them from all contact with evil, their innocence will preserve us from the evil which we avoid for their sakes, and which, perhaps, we should not have avoided for our own. Then, seeing in

their parents the pattern of the good which has been taught them, the children will reverence them also, and good parents will leave behind them christian sons to close their eyes, and to continue their good works.

Prayer.

O Mary! so gentle, so obedient to thy holy mother; O Saint Anne! so tender, so wise with thy holy child, pray for us. Teach all children to love and reverence their parents; teach all parents to bring up, for God, the children He has entrusted to them, to reverence their innocence, to place them in the path which leads to heaven. Bless us, dear mother, bless us all, high and low, and may thy sweet prayers obtain for each of us the knowledge of our duty, and the grace to accomplish it.

Practice.

To have a great reverence for little children.

To endeavour to prepare them for a Christian life, by moulding them to good.

To strive to become better ourselves, in order the better to educate them.

FOURTH DAY.

MARY IN THE TEMPLE—PRAYER.

“ Sursum corda !—Lift up your hearts !”

Whilst Anne and Joachim returned to their desolate home, Mary was received into the interior courts of the temple, amongst the young maidens consecrated to God, and began her new life, far from all noise of earth, under the shadow of the holy altars. It is there that we shall follow her to-day. Let us ask her to send down on us from heaven the pure light which enlightened the obscurity of her childish days. O Mary, obtain for us grace to catch a glimpse of the sanctuary of God, which was the joy of thy youth. A single day, a single instant, spent with thee in His Temple, is worth more than a thousand years of our useless life.

The holy child grew in the sight of God. It was the work of God alone, to form her soul, to adorn daily with new,

graces the sanctuary in which His Son was to repose; and it is beautiful to picture to ourselves the ever increasing light which came down from heaven into the heart of the chosen Virgin. Nothing, however, distinguished her from her companions, except that none were so humble and so submissive. The hours were divided between prayer and work. The ancient Christian authors speak of her precocious reason, of the union of gravity with the pure beauty of childhood in her face, and working men of old encouraged themselves in work by picturing to themselves the future Mother of God, spinning with her companions, and weaving the finest veils of the temple. In one of the most beautiful cathedrals of France, at Amiens, a stall of carved wood, offered five hundred years ago, by the weavers of the town, represents Mary, a basket of spindles by her side, with one hand making the shuttle fly through the woof, with the other tightening the threads. Those workmen knew that the work of him who prays is the most blessed upon earth, and that the most skilful hand is that which obeys the holiest heart.

The Gospel teaches us that there were in the temple holy women, such as Anna the prophetess, whom we shall soon see meeting the Infant God. These holy servants of God, in the decline of life, doubtless loved to teach the young maidens, who were consecrating to Him their brightest days: and often, as the spindles turned in their skilful fingers, must they have related the marvels that the Lord had worked for His people in happier times, have unveiled to them the treasures of the prophecies, and have awakened holy hope in their young hearts by announcing to them the speedy coming of the Son of David, the Saviour promised to Israel.

Then, in solitude, Mary meditated, and, above all, she prayed. Prayer was her first occupation, her constant joy. From the first days of her infancy all her thoughts, all her feelings, were used to rise towards heaven as the sweet smell of a blossoming garden rises in a pure air: but as God by degrees developed her mind and enlightened her soul, she offered herself to Him with a more thoughtful love, and made Him the voluntary gift of her whole life. Exempt from original sin,

she worked like a simple daughter of Eve. Full of grace from the time of her Immaculate Conception, she prayed as if she had to obtain all graces one by one.

Who can penetrate the mystery of Mary's prayer, through the veil which the Gospel draws over the years of her childhood? Who can see the transports of this blessed soul towards God, her complete self-sacrifice, her deep humility, her constant obedience! In the touching history of St. Elizabeth, Queen of Hungary, there are some beautiful passages in which the Blessed Virgin throws some light on this time of her childhood, till then known only to God. "My daughter," she said to her servant, "you think that I had all these graces without much trouble; but it was not so. Truly I say to you that I did not receive one of these graces without great trouble, without continual prayer, an ardent desire, deep devotion, many tears and trials. I wish to teach you," the Virgin blessed amongst all women went on to say, "I wish to teach you all the prayers that I said while I was in the temple. Above all, I asked from God great love of Him and hatred of

my enemy, the devil. There is no perfect virtue without this absolute love of God by which the fulness of grace descends into the soul. But when it has descended into it, it remains not, but flows away like water, if the soul hates not its enemies, that is, sins and vices. He, then, who would know how to preserve this grace from on high, should know how to unite this love and this hate in his soul. I wish you to do all that I did. I rose in the middle of each night, and went to prostrate myself before the altar, where I asked of God grace to observe all the precepts of His law, I besought Him to grant me the graces which I needed in order to be pleasing to Him. Above all, I begged of Him that I might see the time in which that holy Virgin would live who was to bring forth His Son, in order that I might dedicate my whole being to serve and venerate her."

St. Elizabeth interrupted her to ask, "Most sweet Lady, wert thou not already full of graces and of virtues?" But the Blessed Virgin answered her, "Be sure that I thought myself as poor and miserable as you think yourself. Hence it was

that I asked of God to grant me His grace." And afterwards, as the Blessed Virgin initiated her servant more and more in the mysteries of her prayer, and of her sublime intercourse with God and the angels, she added this record of her deep humility: "I wished to be the servant of all the holy women who dwelt in the temple; I wished to be subject to all creatures for love of the Father of all!"

St. Elizabeth then put this question to the Blessed Virgin: "Tell me, my sweet Lady, why thou hadst so intense a desire to see the Virgin who was to bring forth the Son of God." Then Mary related to her how the reading of the prophecies had led her to this idea; how she had resolved to consecrate to God her virginity in order to be worthy to serve this predestined Virgin.*

How touching is this testimony to the humility of Mary which St. Elizabeth has preserved for us; she who was herself so meek and humble, in spite of the weight and splendour of her crown.

The great mystery on which depended

* History of St. Elizabeth, by M. de Montalembert.

the salvation of men was about to be accomplished; the Son of God was about to come down upon earth, and she who was chosen to become His Mother humbled herself before God, and before her companions; and all her dreams, all the hopes of her heart, were limited to seeing the predestined Virgin, and serving her as the most humble of handmaidens. What lessons are contained in Mary's prayer! In her prayer, so humble, so fervent, so full of love and of gratitude! Let us think often of it. Let us often contemplate the Blessed Virgin praying in the temple, or in her humble cell, and then let us kneel down by her side, and, casting a salutary glance upon our own souls, let us ask ourselves if we ever think of prayer, and if we know what it is to pray. To pray is to adore God: it is to thank Him for graces received, to ask Him for more; and for us poor sinners it is to implore His pardon. What is more just than to render homage to Him who is our Creator and our Sovereign Master, to thank Him who has been for us the source of all good! What is more consoling than to speak to Him of our miseries,

to ask from Him patience to endure them, and above all, strength to resist discouragement and temptation ! And when our weakness has given way, what is sweeter than to come as a repentant child, to weep over our faults in the arms of the Father whom we have offended, and who will mingle so many caresses with His reproaches and His lessons ! What more powerful cordial to revive our languor ! Where shall we find a more life-giving food for our soul than in God from whom comes all strength, all courage, all understanding ! We all work, we all suffer, on this earth, which David called a vale of tears. By prayer we draw from the source of life itself, new vigour, which gives us more patience in suffering, more heart for work, more power for good. In order to ascend from the depths of this sad valley to the heaven which is our country, we must not only raise ourselves by patience above suffering, but also by virtue above sin. To do this we need steps, like the steps of a ladder, on which, one after another, our foot rests. Those who know how to pray mount this, from step to step, for, after having spoken to God, like

children full of trust, they offer Him each one of their actions, and so go on from prayer to prayer. It is thus that they build up in their souls the steps which mount from earth to heaven. God, who has imposed on them the law of prayer only to draw them to Himself, will bless them : they shall go from virtue to virtue ; they shall see God in His holy city.*

Whence comes it that so few have recourse to so wonderful a means of salvation ? We are all creatures of God, laden with His graces ; we have all need of help and of pardon : whence comes it, then, that we do not all worship, return thanks, pray, and humble ourselves ? Is prayer so difficult that only a small number of minds and of hearts are capable of it ? —That were but blasphemy. The needs and sufferings of life, though under different forms, are the same to all men, and would God have put help within the reach of the few alone ?

* " *Beatus vir cujus est auxilium abs te, ascensiones in corde suo disposuit in valle lacrymarum.....Etenim benedictionem dabit legislator, ibunt de virtute in virtutem : videbitur Deus Deorum in Sion.*" (Ps. lxxxiii. 6, 7, 8, 9.)

But perhaps some hard working man may say, I have not time to pray : here is the dawn of day ; I must hasten to work. And then he sets out. He sees the morning in its splendour: he thinks not of it. When the burden of the day comes, he works without having in his heart that strength which should make his labour light. He rests without a thought of blessing the Hand which gave us the trees to shelter us during the heat. In vain the *Angelus* rings to call faithful hearts to prayer : he does not listen. Then he works through more long hours, and in the evening he returns home tired, and perhaps with discontent in his heart. He has only cross words for the little children who run to meet him. The day ends as it began, without his having once blessed God. Do the poor say that they cannot pray ? What, the poor, the friends of God, whom He has blessed above all others, they cannot pray ! No ; they say they have no time ; they must gain bread for themselves and their families, and have nothing but their own hands to depend upon. Let those pray who have the time. This is false reasoning. How will they gain

their daily bread if they have not asked it of Him whose fatherly kindness alone can give it to them? Will not He who finds food for the smallest of the birds render to them a hundred-fold for the time that they spend in calling upon Him? And, besides, does it really take so much time to pray? Are long words or difficult prayers required of us? Surely not. It cannot be doubted that there is great merit before God in the prayers our mothers taught us when we were children, and to say them but little time is needed. A few minutes in a day is not much. Do we never spend as long a time in a cause less good? But if, now and then, we really have no time, let us raise our hearts towards God, and kneeling down for a moment before leaving our home, let us say, "My God, I love Thee," and the "Our Father;" let us sign our foreheads with the sign of the cross, and set out with happy hearts. Then let the thought of God go with us on our road. Let us continue our prayer; let us hail Mary our Mother, when the church bell rings, that bell which we love, and the sound of which has mingled with the best joys

of our lives.* How happy should we be if this good habit remained with us, when this month of Mary, in which we have prayed and meditated together, is passed. The day thus begun would be blessed. If the work is heavy and the heat burning, the Christian who has begun the day by prayer will feel in his heart a new life, and a happiness which will overcome weariness. He will offer his suffering to God, and that alone is enough to lighten its weight. Work thus offered to God is itself a prayer. At the hour of rest his thoughts will once again be quickly and fervently raised towards God. In the evening he will bless God again, while returning gaily to his home; he will there find happiness and joy, for the mother and children will have worked and prayed, like the father, and the blessing of God will be on the family. Can anyone think that this day will have been less good, even as regards earthly labour, than that which is begun a few minutes

* The author lives in a country in which the ancient Churches have not been unjustly taken from the Catholics, as they have in England.—*Translator.*

earlier, and without prayer? Such a thought would be absurd.

True prayer consists in offering to God every action of the day, every discouragement, and every hope, in asking with confidence for all that we need, in thanking God with our whole soul for graces received, in imploring His pardon for sins committed, with true repentance and childlike trust. This is true prayer. Let us not refuse it to Him, who gives us all. Let us not refuse such a help to ourselves. Let us pray to Mary our dear Mother to obtain for us this constant thought of God which alone engrossed her blessed soul. Let us love her in order to be like her. Let us think of her oftener during this beautiful month. What a rich harvest of graces would it bring us if we would constantly renew in our souls during these blessed days, the remembrance of our Mother. Let the labourer at his plough, the mother while spinning at her wheel, the child while tending his flock, let each one think of Mary and call upon her. Children, during the long days that you pass thus in the fields alone with your sheep, without other work than that of

preventing them from straying, what hinders you from praying? Call without fear, and in the simplest words, upon your Mother who is in heaven; sing some simple hymn in her praise; gather on the grass, or in the hedges, some pretty flowers to carry to her chapel, or to deck her image in your houses. I was reading this morning the touching history of a little shepherdess, who every evening, on returning from the fields, went to place at the foot of a statue of the Blessed Virgin a crown of flowers, and kneeling in the chapel, prayed for a few minutes, and then went her way with a happy heart. On the day of her death, the Blessed Virgin, whom she had loved so much, was seen to appear at her bed-side: she bent over the sick child, placed on her brow a crown of white roses, and bore up to heaven the soul of her gentle servant.

Prayer.

Let us all pray, let us all pray, young
and old.

O Mary, who didst pray so unceasingly, teach us to offer to God, like thee, the sacrifice of a heart full of love, of humility, and of gratitude. Teach us to pray in joy and in suffering, to bless God every day of our lives, until thy Motherly hand leads us to the throne of thy Divine Son, to obtain from His mercy everlasting rest.

Practice.

Never to put off morning prayer for
vain excuses.

FIFTH DAY.

THE ESPOUSALS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN—
NAZARETH.

“Joseph, her husband, a just man.”—
St. Matt. i. 19.

The Blessed Virgin remained in the temple until the age at which the young maidens brought up under the shadow of the sanctuary returned to their families, to be affianced to a righteous man, and devoted thenceforward to the holy duties of wives and mothers, for which a religious youth had excellently prepared them. What woman, indeed, would better know how to devote herself to these laborious duties, to be good and faithful in her affections, moderate in joy, calm in sorrow, self-sacrificing in all circumstances of life, than she who, from her earliest youth, has had God for her end, her witness, and her teacher? But it was reserved for the holy maiden who was about to leave the temple in obedience to the Jewish law, to set us the example of vir-

tues which the Gospel would soon cause to be so highly honoured on earth. Already she had consecrated to the Lord not only her early youth, but the whole of her life; and without thinking of herself, casting the care of her future upon that God to whom she had offered herself without reserve, she accepted beforehand solitude and humiliation on earth, that she might preserve that spotless purity which had been celebrated in the prophecy of Holy Scripture, in the wonderful language of which she was called the lily among thorns, the mystical rose, the tower of ivory, dazzling with whiteness.

However, the wicked world in the midst of which she was to live and suffer, was not worthy to know the sublimity of Mary's vocation, and it entered into the designs of the Divine Wisdom to conceal under the humble appearance of an ordinary Jewish wife, the Virgin announced by the prophets, who was to give to the world the long-promised Emanuel.

God therefore chose a just man out of the whole human race, to whom He entrusted the Mother of His Son, and later His Son Himself; and now let your minds

be full of solemn reverence while we learn to know and love the first man whom our Divine Saviour loved, and whom, during thirty years He called His father.

This man, raised to the highest dignity to which a son of Adam can ever attain, that of guardian, protector, and adopted father of the Saviour of the world, was a poor carpenter of Nazareth. Like Mary herself, he sprang from the race of David, and from the Kings of Juda. But the glory of this royal house had long since been destroyed, and Joseph, its obscure descendant, living by the work of his hands, in a village, the name of which was scarcely known, had preserved of the inheritance of David only faith in the promises of God and courage in adversity. Kinsman of St. Joachim and St. Anna, no doubt their neighbour and their friend, he perhaps had seen Mary while still quite a child ; perhaps he had consoled the solitude of her aged parents. Be that as it may, ancient authors relate that when the time came that the Blessed Virgin was to leave the temple, several young Hebrews presented themselves at the same time as St. Joseph, to the high priest, who was to

act as father to the orphan daughter of the race of David, and asked her of him in marriage. Amongst them Joseph was the humblest and most venerable for age and virtues, and the poorest. To guide the choice of the high priest each one laid before the altar of the Lord a staff, one of which was to blossom by a miracle. Aaron, the brother of Moses, had formerly been chosen high priest because his staff was found in blossom amongst those of his rivals. Those who here renewed the same trial little knew with what a wonderful priesthood the spouse of Mary was to be invested. Meanwhile, Mary was praying to the Lord. The next morning the staff belonging to the humble Joseph had become green, and a beautiful lily of a spotless whiteness was blooming on its summit. The priests saw in this miracle an evident sign of the choice of God. The humble Virgin received with confidence the spouse whom she knew was to protect her innocence with a father's care. She left the sanctuary which had sheltered the years of her youth, took leave of her companions, and returned to Nazareth with Joseph.

When, after a wearisome journey of several days, the pilgrim who has left Jerusalem and walked towards the north, has climbed a last height, steepest of the Galilean mountains, his heart beats as he pauses to look down upon a narrow valley, and a village, the houses of which, half built and half cut out of the side of the mountain, rise one above the other, interspersed with terraces and gardens. An old convent with blackened walls overlooks the irregular buildings of the village. It is towards this that the eyes of the traveller are directed; for, whatever may be his country, if he is a Christian, he is going to visit brothers who will receive him with touching hospitality, and besides, in the enclosure of this old church he will find the remains of that venerable house to which Joseph brought Mary, and in which the hidden life of Jesus was passed.

It is, then, on this mountain, and over a hamlet yet poorer than the modern village, since its name was never mentioned in the history of Judea, that we can imagine Mary and Joseph arriving, like the pilgrims of the present day, towards sunset. The strong ass, the ordinary means

of conveyance for eastern women, and which has carried the Virgin, still almost a child, through this long journey, hangs its wearied head towards the earth. Mary dismounts, and looks with tearful eyes upon the house in which she is no longer to find her father and mother, and in which her new life is to begin.

It was a humble house: that of the poorest among us is perhaps more spacious and better built. In the side of the mountain a grotto cut out of the rock was divided into two cells; one of them, in which the ground for eighteen hundred years has been worn away by the knees of pilgrims, and in which the rock has been struck in turn by millions of hands anxious to carry away a relic of the holy place, bears the revered name of "Grotto of the Annunciation." It was the sanctuary from which, for thirty years, Mary's prayers were to rise up to God during many hours of the day and night. A rustic building standing before the Grotto completed this poor dwelling, which was richer than all earth's temples, since in it St. Anne and St. Joachim had passed their holy lives, the Blessed Virgin was

born there, and there also the Saviour of the world was to pass His childhood. The place where this building is joined to the rock is marked to this day. This is all that remains at Nazareth; but a pious legend, confirmed by a number of miracles, teaches us that God will not permit either time or men to destroy this first witness of the Childhood of His Son.

About four hundred years ago a troop of barbarous Mussulmen ravaged the neighbourhood of Nazareth. The Holy Land, which had formerly been so gloriously conquered by the arms of Christendom, and which had been governed by Christian Kings of Jerusalem, was again falling into the hands of the Infidels. The Christians were everywhere massacred, as, alas! we have seen them massacred in our own day. The monks who kept the sanctuaries were murdered or dispersed, the sanctuaries themselves were profaned. It was then, says the legend, that the Holy House of Nazareth disappeared, having been removed by the angels, and was carried by them over the sea to a town in Italy called Loretto. Received with reverence by the piety of the faith-

ful, and sheltered now by a magnificent church, the poor house is still standing, and has witnessed for four centuries the prayers of millions of pilgrims, as it witnessed the life of the Holy Family.

Let us kneel before this humble house, like the pilgrims to the Holy Land and to our Lady of Loretto; let us love it as Joseph and Mary loved it, happy in their poverty, and living in prayer and labour under the eye of God. If God has given us a home as poor as theirs, let us think that holiness can make a sanctuary of any dwelling, where happiness can find place even in this world, through resignation, pious affections, and peace. If He has given to our hearths the riches refused to so many others, let us always think of the House of Nazareth, and imagine that we give to Joseph and to Mary whenever we give work or bread to the poor whom the Lord loves. This is the grace which we should ask for ourselves and each other, through the intercession of Mary, and also through the intercession of that great saint whose memory we should endeavour to bear away in our hearts to-night, never again to let it depart. Let us take St. Joseph

for our patron and our friend. His virtues, before which the greatest intellects humble themselves, have nothing in them to alarm us. Labourers, who support your family by the labour of your hands, pray to this holy labourer, who supports by the labour of his hands both the Blessed Virgin and the Infant Jesus. You love people who are easy to speak to; love him then. You can certainly have no difficulty in speaking to him who, sprung from kings as he was, was poor as you are, and your equal in all but holiness. Become holy; love Jesus and Mary as much as he loved them, and you will become quite like St. Joseph. In the meantime tell him all your troubles, simply, as to a friend; he knows them all, and he has the power to remove them, if you deserve it, or to comfort you by teaching you to understand all that your soul will gain by them. Do you think if he was to pray for you that our Saviour would refuse anything to him whom for thirty years He called His father? Listen to what the great St. Teresa says on this subject: "I took for my advocate and my master the glorious St. Joseph, and specially recom-

mended myself to him. I saw clearly afterwards that he whom I had called my master and my father, had delivered me more completely even than I had dared to ask him, in great risks, where the salvation of my soul was endangered. I never remember to this day having asked him a single thing which he has not done for me. To other saints, it appears to me, have been given particular graces, to succour men in one of their necessities, but I know by experience that the glorious St. Joseph succours them in everything; and it is the will of our Blessed Saviour that we should understand that as He submitted upon earth to everything he might order Him to do, since, being only foster-father, he bore the name of father, so He grants him all his requests in heaven, and this has been experienced also by some people whom I have advised to recommend themselves to him. I should wish to persuade all my brethren to become devout servants of this great saint. I never knew a person who had a sincere devotion to him, and who rendered him a special honour, who did not visibly make great advances in virtue; for his interces-

sion does great things for those who recommend themselves to him.....I ask, then, for the love of God, those who will not believe me to make the trial themselves; they will then learn by experience how greatly the soul benefits by commending itself to this glorious patriarch, having a sincere devotion to him.....I do not know how we can think of the Queen of Angels, and of the time when she suffered such hardships with the Infant Jesus, without thanking St. Joseph for having done us all such good service by serving them."

Let us love St. Joseph; let us love him who loved our Saviour so much, who protected Him, who took care of Him, hid Him, and nourished Him. Let us pray to him in life, that we may learn to serve Jesus as he did; let us pray to him in death, that we may die as he did, in the arms of Jesus and Mary.

Prayer.

O holy spouse of our glorious Mother, the simplest of all men and the greatest of all saints, since, while thou wert called the carpenter of Nazareth, it was given to thee to call by the name of son the eternal Son of God, teach us to love the obscurity of thy life, there to wait for Jesus, and there to serve Him as thou didst, with all the devotion of our souls. Bring often to our memories the humble house at Nazareth, that we may ponder at the same time on its poverty and on its greatness, and that, seeing such poor walls destined to contain the Child-God, we may understand that poverty may hide under its daily trials so great a treasure that no earthly sufferings would suffice to pay for it, and may the poorest of our houses become rich in virtues, like the house of Nazareth, and Jesus will come and dwell in them. Mary our holy Mother, and thou Joseph, who hast drawn from our Saviour's love charity for all men, pray for us, that we may adorn our souls as an

abode for Him, and that one day the divine Guest whom we have invited to remain with us, may give us entrance into His eternal kingdom. Amen.

Practice.

Often to return in spirit to the house at Nazareth—whether rich or poor to make it the model of our life. To call upon St. Joseph with confidence, and to love Jesus and Mary as he did.

SIXTH DAY.

THE ANNUNCIATION.

“Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee : blessed art thou amongst women.”—
St. Luke i. 28.

We have now made acquaintance with this poor house of Nazareth, which Mary's prayer and Joseph's holiness had turned into the most wonderful sanctuary in which God was worshipped on earth. Here it is that the oracles of the prophets are about to be fulfilled, and that the thrice holy majesty of God is about to humble Itself. Here it is that the expected Saviour, after whose coming all mankind has so long been sighing, was about to come down from heaven, to take a body and soul like ours, in the womb of the most pure of all creatures. Is there one of us who does not feel annihilated at the grandeur of such a mystery? The intellect is stupified; faith alone enlightens us, and were it not for the text of the Gospel, so beautiful and so simple, no

tongue of man could enter upon this august narrative. Let us humble ourselves, and instead of attempting to grasp with our intellect a blessing so inconceivable, let us be content to pour forth our hearts in grateful love towards our Incarnate Lord. O that our souls may be set on fire by this wonderful mystery of the love of God. O Jesus, Eternal Word, who hast come down from heaven to clothe Thyself with the weakness of a child in the pure womb of Mary, source of our hope, teach us the immensity of Thy self-sacrifice; teach us to love Thee as much as our hearts are able. Alas ! how weak and miserable still will be our gratitude when compared with Thy sacrifice.

When we are awake before daylight, and, after our morning prayers, have gone out into the country in the first light of the dawn, have we not noticed the deep silence of all nature, the calm expectation with which every living thing awaits in silence the appearance of the sun ? The mists roll away and rise up in the valleys, the sky reddens more and more, at length a point of light arises, sets the whole horizon on fire, bathes the fields and moun-

tains in light, and shews us our homes, and the surrounding country as if through a golden haze. Then what a concert, what a hymn of joy breaks forth! How all things sing and bless God, and if only our conscience is at peace, how do we ourselves break our silence and burst forth in blessings to God! Such ought to be the feeling of each one of us when we open the Gospel to read the history of the Annunciation. Let silence reign in our inmost souls, while we think of the birth and holy childhood of Mary, which we have already described, when all was still wrapped in shade. Now the eternal dawn begins to kindle the horizon; the Sun of Righteousness is about to appear. Let us then recollect ourselves, that we may be ready to rejoice when we have greeted the first glow of light which announces to the earth the Desire of all nations.

One morning, says a devout historian of the Blessed Virgin, at this same hour of recollection and silence, Mary was alone in the part of the house which was her sanctuary: her prayer was rising towards heaven with a fervour ever new. She was beseeching God "to permit her to see

with her eyes, and to receive into her arms, the Infant Saviour promised to the world. Grant, O Lord, she repeated, that I may hold this little Infant in my arms, and load Him with caresses.* Suddenly a shining light dazzled the eyes of the praying Virgin, and in the midst of this light stood a heavenly figure, bending low before Mary, in an attitude of reverence.

“The Angel Gabriel,” says the Evangelist St. Luke, “was sent from God into a city of Galilee called Nazareth, to a Virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the House of David : and the Virgin’s name was Mary. And the angel being come in, said unto her : Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women. And when she heard it she was troubled at his saying, and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said to her : Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God. Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall

* St. Bonaventure, Meditations on the Life of Jesus Christ.

be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David His father; and He shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end. And Mary said to the angel: How shall this be done, because I know not man? And the angel, answering, said to her: The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee, and therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elizabeth, she also hath conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren; because no word shall be impossible with God. And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her."

Who can express how much these simple words of Mary contain! That humble acceptance of the Divine Will, that faith which believes in such a mystery, that obedience which consents to become its instrument, as soon as the angel promises her that her spotless virginity shall

be preserved? Mary's humble modesty is troubled at the salutation of the angel. When he bows down before her, as before a superior being, and calls her full of grace, she is at a loss to conceive what manner of salutation this may be. He announces to her her high destiny, but she only abases herself the more in the presence of God, the higher she is exalted above all creatures by the promise brought to her by the angel. Then, when the magnificent hope is given her of becoming the woman blessed amongst all others, so long promised to the earth, the liberator of the human race, the mother of the Redeemer, she bows her pure face to the earth, and says, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." The time is come for us to learn all that we owe to Mary, to feel how far she has shared with God Himself the great work of our redemption, how much she deserves the wonderful names of Mother of Mercy and Second Eve, which the Church has given her. The first woman, through her sin, had caused the ruin of the whole human race; but it was after her fall, when our first parents, leaving happiness behind them, were just

entering a land of exile, that Adam, casting a look of grief and hope upon his sorrowful companion, called her Eve, which signifies, the holy Scripture tells us, that she was to be the mother of all the living. What a mystery is this! How could she, who was to be the mother of so many miserable beings, condemned beforehand and through her own fault, to suffering and death, how could she deserve the name of mother of all the living? This name was given to her by the promise of God, which supported our first father in this terrible hour, and shewed him, in the unhappy woman at his side, bowed down with the weight of humiliation and repentance, the mother of a race hostile to the serpent, from which would one day spring the victorious woman who would bruise under her heel the head of this cursed one, and bring back salvation to the earth. "What does this mean?" says St. Epiphanius, one of the most illustrious doctors of the Church; "she had not this beautiful name while she was still in paradise; she is first called the mother of the living after she has been condemned to be for the future the mother of the

dead. Hence this great bishop says that she is called thus as a type and figure of the Blessed Virgin, who is the true Mother of all the living, to whom she has given life by the birth of her child.”*

Yes, Mary is the true mother of all the living, the second Eve, who has brought salvation and life into the world, to which the first Eve had brought only sorrow and death. “By a woman came death,” says St. Augustine, “by a woman came life: by Eve ruin, by Mary salvation.”

And do not doubt that Mary acted freely in this great work of our salvation. Just as Eve had brought ruin on us all by a free act of her will, when she listened to the words of the serpent, when she suffered that sacrilegious promise of pride, “you shall be as gods,” to enter into her heart, when she stretched forth her hand, gathered the fatal apple, ate of it herself, and gave of it to Adam; so did Mary accept the command of God by a free act of her will when she replied to the angel, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord,

* Bossuet, *Elevations sur les Mysteries*.

be it done unto me according to thy word." Eve, through pride, had believed in the deceiving words of the devil, and this faith in the promises of the tempter had brought ruin on us. Mary in humility believes in the words of the angel, and this faith in the promises of God has saved us. A sin of rash credulity, says a doctor of the Church, is effaced by a holy faith.*

How can our hearts remain cold at contemplating this wonderful mystery? How can we fail to feel in the depths of our souls, gratitude and love for the God Who lowers Himself to us, "Who takes the humble form of a servant," Who clothes Himself in our misery and poverty in order to enrich us with His graces, and, together with this, deep devotion and tender gratitude towards that august creature whose purity made her meet to be the Mother of our Saviour, and whose humility, faith, and obedience, were the sources of our salvation? This is the time to feel that inexpressible happiness and peace of

* "Quod illa credendo deliquit, hæc credendo delevit."
(Tertullian, quoted by Bossuet.)

which we spoke just now, and the joy of all nature at her awakening, the hymn of gratitude and of love which she sends up to her Creator at the first rays of daylight, is only a feeble type of what our feelings should be when we hear the words of the angel: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee," and then that humble acceptance of God's will with which the gentle Virgin answers: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word." Let us all rejoice, for the words on which our salvation depends are pronounced. A pure and brilliant dawn breaks, and the east is lighted up by the first rays of the Eternal Sun. Break out, then, into singing, ye who for so many centuries have sat in darkness. The long night is at last come to an end, and the day is breaking. Its gladsome light shines at length over the horizon of our life, hitherto so sorrowful; and every scene and labour of our pilgrimage is lighted up and transfigured by hope.

For our prayer, let us say to-night, with more fixed attention, deeper reverence, and more tender love, that most beautiful

prayer of the Angelic Salutation. For a resolution, let us promise Mary never to pass a day without saying to her, while pondering on the mystery of the Incarnation, the source of all our hopes: "Hail Mary, full of grace;" for, according to the great Bishop Bossuet, Mary's graces include, not only those which God gave her when He raised so humble a creature to the wonderful dignity of Mother of God, but every grace which we receive through her belongs to her, is part of her glory, and was included in the angel's words. With him let us hail this pure creature of God, at once virgin and mother; and let us also bless her in the words of the pious woman in the Gospel, who, seeing Jesus, cried out from the midst of the crowd: "Blessed is the womb that bore Thee, and the breasts that gave Thee suck!" Ave Maria!

SEVENTH DAY.

VISITATION.

“Let us love one another, for charity is of God.”—I. St. John iv. 7.

“Mary, rising up in those days,” says the Evangelist St. Luke, “went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judea. And she entered into the house of Zachary and saluted Elizabeth.”

What powerful reason, what important business thus draws Mary from her retirement? The house of Nazareth had become still more dear to her, since God had deigned to come down to it. Possessing in herself Him who was at once her God and her Son, her mind and heart absorbed in the contemplation of so great a mystery, she loved better than ever to remain in solitude, thanking with all the powers of her soul the God upon whom she had so often called in her youth, and who had vouchsafed to choose her to bring salvation to the world. How comes it, then, that she goes forth to-day?

When the angel announced to Mary the mystery which was about to be accomplished in her, he spoke these words to her, "And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she also has conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren." Mary remembered these words, and her generous heart, so humble amid her own joy, rejoiced at the blessing accorded by the Lord to her kinswoman. She rose up, therefore, and went with haste into the hill country, where Elizabeth lived.

Who, then, was this Elizabeth, and who was Zachary, whose house was deemed pure enough to receive the Mother of the thrice holy God? Let us again open the Gospel of St. Luke. (i. 5-25.) "There was, in the days of Herod the King of Judea, a certain priest named Zachary, of the course of Abia, and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name Elizabeth. And they were both just before God, walking in all the commandments and justifications of the Lord without blame. And they had no son, for that Elizabeth was barren, and they both were well advanced in years. And it came to

pass, when he executed the priestly function in the order of his course before God, according to the custom of the priestly office, it was his lot to offer incense, going into the temple of the Lord, and all the multitude of the people was praying without at the hour of incense. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And Zachary, seeing him, was troubled, and fear fell upon him; but the angel said to him: Fear not, Zachary, for thy prayer is heard, and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John; and thou shalt have joy and gladness, and many shall rejoice in his nativity. For he shall be great before the Lord; and shall drink no wine nor strong drink: and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And he shall convert many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. And he shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elias; that he may turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the incredulous to the wisdom of the just, to prepare unto the Lord a perfect people. And Zachary

said to the angel : Whereby shall I know this ? for I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years. And the angel, answering, said to him : I am Gabriel, who stand before God ; and am sent to speak to thee, and to bring thee these good tidings. And behold, thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be able to speak until the day wherein these things shall come to pass, because thou hast not believed my words, which shall be fulfilled in their time. And the people was waiting for Zachary ; and they wondered that he tarried so long in the temple. And when he came out he could not speak to them, and they understood that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he made signs to them, and remained dumb. And it came to pass after the days of his office were accomplished, he departed to his own house. And after those days Elizabeth, his wife conceived, and hid herself five months, saying : Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein He hath had regard to take away my reproach among men."

Such, then, were the righteous people whom Mary went to visit. The angel

Gabriel had solemnly announced to her the miracle by which God had bestowed a son upon their old age, and had even given this to her as a sign and proof of the miracle of the Incarnation. And now, as soon as the Divine Word had become Incarnate in her womb, she hastened towards the dwelling of Elizabeth, that the Mother of Jesus might visit the mother of St. John the Baptist. The birth of this child was to come before the birth of the Infant God, because it was he who was one day to bear the glorious name of the Forerunner of Christ; it was he of whom the prophet said, "A voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight His paths." He was to be the first to believe in Jesus Christ, the first to suffer and to die for Him. These mysteries, however, were as yet hidden from the Blessed Virgin Mary, and to fulfil the Divine purposes she had only to follow that generous instinct, so powerful in her soul, so powerful still in all holy souls, the instinct of charity. Do we well understand all that this word means? It gathers into one all holy affections, all

sacrifices. It is that most excellent of all virtues, without which, St. Paul says, even one who should have all other virtues would become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal, making the sound of virtue without having the foundation. "Dearly beloved," says the great Evangelist St. John to his disciples, "let us love one another, for charity is of God. And every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God: for God is charity..... God is charity: and he that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him."* Thus we see that those souls who are most united to God through sanctity, are also most united to men through charity. Those who love God above all things, love their neighbour as themselves for the love of God. All the holy affections of earth come from heaven. They are reflected in a pure soul as we see the stars which shine in the skies reflected in a transparent piece of water by our side; and as these bright stars have but one Creator, so all these pure affections

* I St. John iv. 7, 8, 16.

which shine in our souls have but one centre, God, Who is pure love, Who is Charity. In Him are united holy family affections, pious friendships, generous sacrifices, brotherly feelings towards all men, as being, like ourselves, God's children, compassion for their sufferings, and sympathy with their joys. Mary is the most holy of creatures. How easy it is to shew that she was also the most charitable! How often in her holy life do we see charity in every shape! Let us first seek it in this painful journey undertaken to visit her cousin St. Elizabeth.

Sometimes we make to ourselves a stern and gloomy picture of our holy religion, we fear God more than we love Him, and, like little children who call upon their mother when they suffer, we stretch out our hands, with tears in our eyes, to our Mother who is in heaven. But why should we consecrate to her our sorrowful days alone? Has she no smiles for our joys as well as comfort for our griefs? See how she leaves her beloved solitude: she rose up and went with haste. Her cousin is happy. The Lord has delivered her from the reproach she had suffered

among men. Mary, the child given to St. Anne in her old age understands the joy of Elizabeth : she hastens to her aged kinswoman ; she comes to rejoice with her, to offer her services, to add to her joy the blessing of her own friendship.

Some pious authors have thought that gratitude was joined to Mary's love for her friend, and that Zachary was one of the priests who had taught her as a child in the temple, had protected her youth, and had chosen her spouse. Gratitude is one of the forms of charity, for charity means affection, and what is more just than to love those who have done us good ? See how prompt and devoted is the gratitude of Mary's generous heart, the sanctuary of all love !

"The Blessed Virgin left Nazareth," says St. Bonaventure ; "the difficulty and length of the road did not delay her. She hastens because she does not wish to expose herself too long to notice. Consider how the Queen of Heaven travels : on foot, alone with her spouse, without means of conveyance. She is not surrounded by a retinue of courtiers and guards, she is not accompanied by a number of ladies of

honour, or servants. She is escorted by poverty, by humility, and by the honourable assemblage of all virtues. Her Lord is also with her, attended by a numerous escort of honour, very different from the vain pomp of this world."

What a wonderful train attends this lowly maiden, walking over the rough mountain path, leaning on the arm of the humble Joseph! O wonderful train, which God has put within the reach of each one of His children! There are times in life when we feel ourselves to be very poor, very unhappy, and very much abandoned. Let us then think of the train that waited on Mary. Is holy poverty of spirit and heart our companion? Are our steps followed by humility, purity, and the noble company of all virtues? If our conscience can render us this testimony, let us raise our heads and take courage. Listen once more to what St. Bonaventure says: "The Lord is with her, bringing with Him all graces and all blessings." Courage, then, and if we can say with truth that we seek them, we may be sure that God Himself is with us, and may continue to walk on with confidence.

Let us remember, above all, that this train of honour accompanies us every time that, following Mary's footsteps, we go to perform a mission of charity. I have just said that we find this virtue in many different shapes in the life of our holy Mother. In ours also it ought to be found under the most different forms; what is necessary is, that in one way or another it should be everywhere. Let us practice in our families, let us carry out into the world, this devoted affection, this sympathetic consoling ministering friendship, of which the Blessed Virgin sets us the example, in setting off without delay as soon as St. Elizabeth had need of her; this reverence for age, from which she does not think herself exempted by her dignity of Mother of God, this gratitude for past services which calls her to the side of the protectors of her youth. What blessings would be found at the domestic hearth, what ease in all human relations, what softening of painful jars, if charity was always present, like oil to a wheel, making it turn quickly, noiselessly, and with ease. The reason that it is so often wanting in family life and in society is,

that even good people know and understand it not. For instance, it is confounded with alms-deeds, which is, in truth, but one of its forms. People say, "I cannot afford to give in charity." This is rarely the case, but grant that it is so, does this prevent the practice of charity? Would God, Who has so many times said that poverty is holy, have put the most beautiful of the virtues out of the reach of the poor? It would be a kind of blasphemy to say so. Charity is more in the heart than in the purse. The rich can and ought to be charitable to the poor. The poor also can and ought to be charitable to the rich, like Mary, the spouse of the poor carpenter Joseph, to her cousin, the wife of Zachary. The great secret is to love, whoever we may be, our brethren, whoever they may be. Love your equals, you will make them happier and better, for charity is infectious, and your example will teach them. If they are happy, rejoice with them without inquiring whether their happiness is greater than yours. If they are unhappy, dry their tears as you would wish them to dry yours. If they are poorer than you

are, seek in your hearts the means of helping them, and you will find it; if you are the poorest, suffer without bitterness in charity with your brethren, and, above all, with Jesus Christ, Who has suffered so much for you, and you will find a treasure in your misery.

Have charity in your hearts, and you will practice charity. Our business is to love: God will take care of the rest, and will never let a sincere good will lie useless. We are the children of a God who is charity itself, and we know in what manner He has proved it to the world. To save the wretches whom His justice had condemned, he became man and died. This is an act of charity worthy of our God. He continues this work of our salvation every day by supporting, directing, and pardoning us; and if, contemplating such miracles, we fall prostrate on the earth, crying out that we should never be able to imitate such high charity, here is the gentle Virgin Mary showing us, as in a spotless mirror, the charity which comes from God, and throwing her humility like a veil over His dazzling light.

She shews us divine charity applied to

human things which we can imitate, whether it be in this touching history of the visitation, or in her life at Nazareth, poor amongst the poor, or at Cana of Galilee, when her intercession obtains the first miracle from her Son, until this charity, doubling in strength as she pours it out upon all around, at last ascends Mount Calvary, where the Mother of the Saviour of the world unites herself to God in offering her Son for the salvation of man.

All sacrifices, I repeat once more, come from the same source. The charity of God is the inextinguishable flame at which are enkindled all those which have enlightened, warmed, and vivified the world, from the charity of the Blessed Virgin, of the martyrs and heroes of the Gospel, down to that of every holy soul who, in the humility of an obscure life, loves God with all his strength, and his neighbour for the love of Him. The merit of a work consists, not in the splendour it sheds around, nor in the noise it makes, but in the love which inspires it; and there are actions, very humble and mean in the sight of man, which, at the day of

judgment we shall see placed by the side of the noblest and most holy, because they will have contributed, by the charity which inspired them, and by the charity which they will have left in a suffering heart, to the great work of God, the salvation of souls.

Let it, therefore, never be said, that charity is only possible to those of our brethren to whom God has given the material means of almsgiving. They would do but little good if they did not give, with their money, their time, their intelligence, their sacrifices, and their affection. This is the vital principle of almsdeeds, and in order to make fruitful any money which is given, it must come from charitable hands. Do we not all, even the poorest amongst us, possess that which constitutes the virtue, and, so to speak, the soul of almsdeeds, namely, intelligence, affection, and self-sacrifice? We may not have much time, but if we never waste it, we shall have enough to comfort the poor, our relations, friends, and brethren. Those who have little, let them give little, so that they give willingly. There are times when a smile, a sympathising word,

or a friendly counsel, are better alms than money, which may not be in our power to give. Sometimes, even charity multiplies the loaves, as Jesus did of old. Our meal will not be greatly diminished, because the orphan has shared it with our children.

Mary and Joseph were as poor as the poorest among us, yet no doubt the village of Nazareth was filled with their acts of kindness. Can we imagine anything more pleasant for a poor sick person than to see at his bedside the sympathizing face of Mary, or to hear her sweet voice speaking of heaven? Let us picture to ourselves our Divine Mother nursing the aged and little children, mending their poor garments with her own hands, comforting the sorrowful, having a kind word for each, and making more holy all who look upon her; and St. Joseph, so venerable and gentle, encouraging virtue by his example, and exhorting to the practice of it by his counsel. No one ever approached the house at Nazareth without carrying away a richer alms than if he had visited the palace of a king.

What Joseph and Mary did at Nazareth

we can all do. Happy, a thousand times happy is the village in which charity reigns, in which it is practised in different forms by high and low, the same love being in the hearts of all, in which its influence banishes bitter words, jealousies, and angry feelings, where true brotherhood prevails, where evil is put to shame and good encouraged, and of which may be said with truth what was formerly said by the pagans of the first disciples of Jesus Christ: "It is a people of brothers." We have hitherto spoken of the charity of the Blessed Virgin during her earthly life, but we cannot fail to remember with joy that the reign of charity still lasts. The Mother of our Redeemer, like Himself, is now more full of charity than ever before. Still does she practise among us those ministries of charity to which she was always so much devoted. She visits us as of old, sympathetic in joy and helpful in sorrow or want. When we are abandoned she shews us her love, when we toil she helps us, when we are sick she comes to our bedside, and whispers holy words to our hearts. When we are gathered round her feet in her chapel she is in the midst

of us, and offers to her Divine Son every holy motion of our hearts. Mary comes to visit us, let us, therefore, be always ready to receive her. Let there be nothing in our dwellings or in our souls to offend her eyes, and that our holy Mother may be pleased with us, let us love and practise charity, of which, after her Divine Son, she is the most perfect model.

Prayer.

O Mary, whom the Church calls the House of Gold, the sanctuary of charity, obtain for us this holy charity, that it may at once soothe and rouse our souls, that it may make us gentle to our brethren, and may excite us to devote ourselves to serve them for the love of God. Make us feel deeply both their joys and their troubles, that we may go to them as thou didst go to St. Elizabeth, and that we may know, like thee, how to cheer and console them. O Mother of Mercy, bring often to our memory thy holy and generous poverty, that we may know the source of true charity, and may love others as we wish to be loved.

Practice.

Often to think of the Blessed Virgin comforting the poor at Nazareth, and visiting her cousin, to rejoice with her, and to nurse her in her sufferings. Every time a work of charity presents itself, to ask ourselves, what would Mary have done?

EIGHTH DAY.

MAGNIFICAT.

“My soul doth magnify the Lord.”—
St. Luke i. 46.

In five weary days' travelling on foot the Blessed Virgin crossed the mountains which separated Nazareth from the land of Judea. She arrived at length at the little town in which dwelt Elizabeth and Zachary. “And she entered,” says the holy Gospel, “into the house of Zachary, and saluted Elizabeth. And it came to pass that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost. And she cried out with a loud voice, and said: Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should visit me? For behold, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy.”

In this simple Gospel narrative, let us admire the miracle worked in this highly favoured woman, the first to whom God revealed the coming of His Son upon earth by the visit of Mary and our Divine Saviour. The moment the humble traveller crosses the threshold of the holy dwelling prodigies succeed one another. At the first accents of that sweet voice which says, "Hail, my sister Elizabeth!"* the predestined infant who is to be the forerunner of Mary's Divine Son, leaps for joy in his mother's womb, and his mother herself, filled with the Holy Ghost, recognizes in her young cousin the Mother of her God, and proclaims her blessed among all women.

Then Mary, breaking the silence she has kept since the Annunciation, praises God in that wonderful canticle, the most beautiful that has ever been uttered by human lips.

"My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. Because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid: for behold from henceforth all generations shall call

* St. Bonaventure, Meditations.

me blessed. Because He that is mighty hath done great things to me : and holy is His name. And His mercy is from generation to generation, to them that fear Him. He hath showed might in His arm : He hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart. He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away. He hath received Israel His servant, being mindful of His mercy. As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his seed for ever."

The Church has appointed that every day Mary's glorious canticle should be sung at Vespers, in order that the faithful may never let a day end without rendering homage to their Mother, by standing to repeat, at the sound of the bell, with all signs of reverence and joy, that which is the song at once of her triumph and of our deliverance. We know it under the name of the *Magnificat* ; its accents are familiar to our ears, would that the sense were as familiar to our hearts. For in it the highest and most consoling truths of our faith are expressed with such wonder-

ful clearness that if we knew aright how to understand and meditate on the *Magnificat* we should believe and hope as the saints believe and hope.

Let us, then, meditate on it a moment together, and let us ask our holy mother to be in the midst of us, to enable us to understand it.

Is it a cry of earthly joy and of human pride which breaks from the heart of Mary when Elizabeth bows her venerable head before her, and pays her that homage which no daughter of Eve had ever yet received? "Whence is this to me, that the Mother of my God should come to me?" No; Mary's heart is as humble since she has known her high destiny as it was in the first years of her youth, when she desired to be the handmaid of the holy women in the temple. But, inspired by a spirit of prophecy, she sees in the future the deliverance of her people, the deliverance of the whole world, accomplished by her divine Son, she sees the powers of evil overthrown, and the reign of the Saviour established in this world, according to His eternal promises. Boundless joy and gratitude flood her soul as she

considers that it is through her that He deigns to accomplish so many miracles, that it is she who has been chosen to give life to the Saviour of the world. Then it is that she cries out in those wonderful words in which humility shines forth as much as joy: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. Because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid; for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."

Then the Mother of God goes on to prophecy the deliverance of all nations, a deliverance greatly needed, for idolatry reigned on the earth, and all that was small and weak groaned under the oppression of the strong. The great city of Rome, at that time mistress of the whole world, herself torn by factions and trembling under cruel masters, revenged herself by oppressing the subject nations. Her chief citizens, themselves oppressed, took their revenge by oppressing others in their turn, and slavery, descending step by step, reached from the highest to the lowest, crushing the humblest classes. There was no justice, no law, but the law

of the strongest. The only nation to which the law of God was known was groaning under the same yoke, slavery being imposed upon it in punishment for its too long ingratitude. And from the whole earth a sad concert of complaints and groans rose up towards heaven. Suddenly a song of hope resounds. "The mercy of the Lord is from generation unto generations, to them that fear Him. He hath shewed might in His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart. He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away. He hath received His servant Israel, being mindful of His mercy. As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his seed for ever."*

What, then, are these new sounds? How can prodigies such as these be accomplished? Will the Saviour be, as the Hebrews hope, a terrible conqueror, who will dim the glory of David and Josue, and break the chains of the people of Israel?

* St. Luke i.

No; that would be the deliverance of one small nation only, and the whole earth has need of deliverance. He will be called by the Jews the son of the carpenter; on the shores of the lake of Galilee He will choose twelve fishermen as poor as Himself. He will spend a few years preaching the kingdom of God to the unknown, and consoling the miseries of the obscure. When the powerful of this world become aware of His existence they will fasten Him to a cross between two thieves. But behold from His blood, as from a divine seed, will rise a power never before known. Those twelve ignorant fishermen will be filled with marvellous knowledge; they will publish, in all languages of the earth, the history and the lessons of the crucifixion. Those weak men who, with a single exception, will abandon their beloved Master in His sufferings, will afterwards brave everything, they will be the unconquerable shepherds of a persecuted flock. They will go to teach humility, love, and peace, even in mighty Rome, where nothing is known but pride and hate; they will be persecuted, scourged, and crucified, like their Master. But still,

marvellous to relate, to each martyred shepherd another shepherd will succeed, the flock which seems abandoned to the wolves will continually increase. "The mercy of God is from generation unto generations, to them that fear Him." And soon the old empire of the persecutors will tremble to its foundations. At a sign from God nations hitherto unknown will pour in, like another deluge, covering the lands of the wicked, and on these tumultuous waves, which seem about to swallow up everything, a holy ark will, by the grace of God, save the persecuted, and thus they will escape the shipwreck. And what holy ark is this? It is the Church: the holy Church, whose seat God has established in that same city of Rome, in which the first Pope, St. Peter, chosen and consecrated by Jesus Christ Himself, was crucified like his Master. There it is that God caused the "might of His arm" to weigh heavily on the lords of the world; there it is that He "scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart." It was to make room for His Church that He put down the mighty from their seat. It is in her bosom that the humble are

exalted, that the hungry are filled with good things. And the true Israel received into the arms of the Lord is the true Church, the heir to His promises, and the depositary of His teaching. It is by her and in her that we are the people of God, that people gathered from all nations of the earth, which Jesus Christ calls to share His heavenly kingdom.

Let us, then, sing with Mary the song of our deliverance, but let us remember that none have the right to sing it save the children of the Church. Let us love the Church as our shelter and safeguard, which has been the author and preserver not only of our hopes in heaven, but also of all that we hold dear on earth.

This is true of men of all nations, but there are none to whom it applies so strongly as to the people of our beloved England; for nothing is more certain than that all that is great and glorious in her came from the Catholic Church. The first Englishmen, when they landed upon the shores of this fair island (which was then called Britain) were a horde of wild blood-thirsty savages, who destroyed all that they found, burning cities and villages,

and slaughtering the old inhabitants, men, women, and children. From the day on which they took possession of Britain it lost its place in the civilized world, its very name was forgotten, Britain was no more, and England, as it then for the first time began to be called, was for many years a scene of bloody wars, murder, and violence. The inhabitants of each district were always at war with their neighbours; the strong were, sooner or later, killed in battle; the weak, the women and children, were taken prisoners and sold as slaves into foreign lands. Such was our beloved England before the Catholic Church rose upon it, as the sun rises to dispel the darkness of some stormy night. We all know, but it cannot be too often repeated, how the deliverance of our fathers was brought about. The heart of St. Gregory the Great, the first Pope of the name, while as yet he was only a humble monk, was melted with compassion at the sight of a group of beautiful fair-haired English children exposed for sale in the slave market at Rome, and when he became Pope his first care was to send a band of Roman priests to bring to

England the glad tidings of great joy. From this little seed sprang the Christian England which for many centuries was known over all the Christian world as the Island of Saints; and whatever there is in England to this day that is good and glorious, its seeds were sown when it was the first boast of England's people and of England's kings to be faithful children of the Catholic Church, and that their island was "the dowry of the Blessed Virgin Mary." Then it was that our good old laws and our English liberty were established. Then, for the first time, the rich learned to be humble and charitable, and the poor to be content, and the religious houses gave full opportunities of giving themselves up to the service of God in peace and blessedness to every one, whether rich or poor, who was called by God's grace to that happy life. But alas, the devil envied the happiness of England, and on a miserable day, some three hundred years ago, he succeeded in separating her from the Catholic Church. The wretched King Henry VIII. and his most vile daughter Elizabeth, made themselves tyrants over both the bodies and the souls

of Englishmen. The churches were taken from the religion for which they were built, and given to the Protestant parsons, and the lands which had been given by our fathers to the churches, and abbeys, and convents, for the benefit of the poor, were seized by force, and although the parsons of course got as much of them as they could, the greater part was given to the king's rich favourites. Worse than all, the children of many generations, as they grew up, one after another, were taught to believe lies against the Church and the Pope, and the priests, and the monks, and the nuns, whom for centuries past their fathers, who really knew what they were, had loved and honoured as their greatest benefactors. These lies were taught them lest, if they knew the truth, they should turn away with disgust from the Protestant parsons, and return to the religion which had made England great and happy; and should take away the abbey lands from the favourites to whom Henry VIII. had given them. And so things got worse and worse, and poor English men and women had to be shut up in union workhouses, and fed by poor

rates, names never heard of till England became Protestant. For many long years the Catholic Church was persecuted by those who had got England into their power, and every priest who came in (like those sent long before by Pope Gregory I.) to bring blessings to the people, was put to death in tortures, and Englishmen were taught to blaspheme and revile the names of those who had ever been the chief benefactors of their country. This persecution, no doubt, would have been going on to this day, if it had not happened that the Protestants, divided into a number of different sects, and after a great many years, in which each of these sects, as it got into power, persecuted all the rest, they agreed that the best and safest course would be to settle that in future each man should be left at liberty to believe and profess whatever he pleased. When this was done, the Catholics, who had been obliged to hide themselves during the long persecution, came out of their hiding places, and openly practised their religion. All at once it began to spread. Numbers of the wisest, best, and most religious men and women who had been brought up

Protestants, and had all their lives believed the lies against Catholics which they had been taught when they were children, found out that they were lies, and that the Catholic religion was the only truth, and so it once again began to spread over the land. This is the meaning of all the nonsense which we now hear talked against Popery and priests, and convents. It is raised by the devil, who is enraged to have his old lies found out and exposed. Besides this, many of the best people who still remain Protestants, seeing how much better the Catholic religion is, are trying to bring in Catholic rites and worship into the Protestant Established Church. These are the people called Ritualists. We must pray that their eyes may be opened to see that this is useless and vain, and that they cannot really be Catholics except by submitting, as their fathers did, to the one Catholic Church.

Meanwhile, for us who have the blessing of being Catholics, whether we have always been so, or have been brought by God's grace into the Church, let us love the Church, and never suffer her to be

insulted. When she is suffering, let us pray for her. Let us aid her poverty. The more she is afflicted, the more faithful ought we to be. Let us blush to range ourselves on the side of the strong against the weak, on the side of the ungrateful against our benefactress. As Christians let us know how to distinguish the manifest character of divinity which shines in this weakness of the Church, unarmed, assailed, always attacked, always triumphant. Let us be on the side of God.

Prayer.

O Mary, Help of Christians, thou whose prayers bear unceasingly to the foot of the throne of God the wants and cries of the holy Church, thou, the Queen of the Apostles who founded her, of the martyrs who cemented her with their blood, of the doctors who taught in her name, of the saints who have honoured her by their virtues, watch over her in these difficult times; obtain for her august head the inspirations of divine wisdom, and for her children a filial and devoted heart, which may understand the sorrows of their

common mother, and may know how to come to her aid with prayer and alms-deeds. Remember, Mary, that thou wert the first to prophesy her reign, that thy voice, which sang her glory, rises at all hours at the foot of the throne of God, that He may take in hand the cause of His servant Israel, being mindful of His mercies and His promises. Amen.

Resolution.

Never to pass a day without praying for the Pope, and for our holy Mother the Church.

NINTH DAY.

BIRTH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST—THE
BENEDICTUS.

St. Luke tells us that "Mary abode with Elizabeth about three months."* "In deep humility and duteous love, she lavished upon her services and ministrations, as if she had forgotten that she herself was the Mother of God and the Queen of the Universe."† When Elizabeth's time was come, she brought forth a son. St. Bonaventure says Mary received him into her arms; it was from her that he received the first of those cares which are indispensable to the frail life of an infant. He fixed upon her eyes full of love, as if he understood who she was; when she gave him to his mother his eyes were turned upon Mary, and he seemed to find no pleasure except in this sweet contemplation. Mary smiled upon him gra-

* St. Luke i. 56.

† St. Bonaventure, *Meditations on the Life of Jesus Christ*, chap. v.

ciously, and pressed him to her heart with kisses which filled him with delight. Who this favoured child was, thus received at his first entrance into life by the blessings of the Mother of God, we all know. As she held him in her arms she looked, no doubt with prophetic forethought, upon the little one who had leapt in his mother's womb at the first sound of her voice. She saw his eyes fixed upon her with an intelligence beyond his age. As she pressed him to her heart, and lavished upon him her holy caresses, she knew that the son of Elizabeth was bound to her own by a supernatural tie, and meanwhile who shall express the joy and holy gratitude of St. Elizabeth? With what emotion must Zachary have blessed in his heart this child, whom he could not as yet bless in words, for he had remained dumb since the day on which he had doubted the word of the angel.

The Gospel tells us that "her neighbours and kinsfolk heard that the Lord had shewed His great mercy towards her, and they congratulated with her. And it came to pass that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they

called him by his father's name Zachary. And his mother answered saying, Not so, but he shall be called John. And they said to her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name. And they made signs to his father how he would have him called. And demanding a writing table he wrote, saying, John is his name. And they all wondered. And immediately his mouth was opened, and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. And fear came upon all their neighbours, and all these things were noised abroad over all the hill country of Judea. And all they that heard them laid them up in their heart, saying, What an one, think ye, shall this child be? For the hand of the Lord was with him."

This is the first miracle which made known to the world the high destinies of St. John the Baptist. Let us listen to the beautiful words by which Zachary makes use of the voice which has been restored to him. If the hearts of those who heard him had been open to receive the truth, they would have understood that this canticle of joy which broke from the lips of the holy Levite was a homage

rendered to One greater than his son, to the promised and expected Saviour, of whom the child so miraculously given to his old age was to prepare the way on earth. Mary alone received in her heart the words the full meaning of which none but she and the happy parents of St. John the Baptist could understand, and if we may believe the holy doctor,* whom God may perhaps have allowed to see for our consolation the unknown details of this wonderful scene, Mary attentively “listened in silence and secrecy to this canticle, in which her Son is spoken of in such wonderful terms, and laid up all these words carefully in her heart.”

But to return to the words of the Gospel. “And Zachary his father was filled with the Holy Ghost : and he prophesied, saying : Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, because He hath visited and wrought the redemption of His people : and hath raised up a horn of salvation to us, in the house of David His servant : as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who are from the beginning : salvation from

* St. Bonaventura,

our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to shew mercy to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant. The oath which He swore to Abraham our father, that He would grant to us, that being delivered from the hand of our enemies, we may serve Him without fear, in holiness and justice before Him all our days. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Most High; for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His way; to give knowledge of salvation to His people, unto the remission of their sins. Through the bowels of the mercy of our God, in which the Orient from on High hath visited us, to enlighten them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death; to direct our feet into the way of peace.”*

How full is this wonderful canticle of the same hopes which are found in the *Magnificat*, of which it appears to be the development. Mary announced the deliverance, Zachary announces the Saviour who is to accomplish it, the Saviour promised to the patriarchs, foretold by the

* St. Luke i. 67-79.

saints and prophets of the old law, Who comes to deliver us from the slavery of the devil and sin, that "being delivered from the hands of our enemies, we may serve Him without fear, in holiness and justice before Him all our days." And what a wonderful light God, by whom he was inspired, throws on the mission of the forerunner of the Saviour, who is to come after him !

"And thou child shalt be called the prophet of the Highest, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord." He, then, Whose way was to be prepared by John on earth, is none other than the Lord from heaven, and it is as announcing Him to men that John will be called the prophet of the Most High. Now comes the mission of the forerunner. "Thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways. To give knowledge of salvation to His people, unto the remission of their sins, through the bowels of the mercy of our God." It is mercy as well as penance which John comes to announce to the world. A mercy such as the earth had never known ; for the most marvellous act of God's mercy under the

old law was the promise of the Redeemer, following immediately on the condemnation of our first parents; and on this promise the whole human race had lived for four thousand years, surrounded by the sorrows which sin had entailed on them. But here the bowels of the Divine mercy are moved like those of a mother for the sufferings of her children; and it is in the name of this mercy that He who is to dissipate so much darkness appears upon earth. "The Orient from on High hath visited us. To enlighten them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to direct our feet into the way of peace." Since Adam's sin had introduced death into the world, each succeeding generation was wrapped in that night so justly called by the Holy Scriptures the shadow of death. The spirits of the just who had served God on earth, although departed, were still sighing for deliverance, as they had done in this life, and it was through hope alone that some rays of light were reflected into the darkness in which they were waiting for the dawn. But listen to Zachary: "The Orient from on High hath visited us." He will dissi-

pate for ever this fatal night, and shed floods of light over the regenerated earth. The just man of the new law, looking upon death, not as the end of life, but only as the last step to be taken "in the way of peace," by which the Lord has brought him to Himself, will say with another prophet, "O grave, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?"

Such is the wonderful canticle of Zachary, called the Benedictus, from the Latin word with which it begins. The Church orders it also, like the *Magnificat*, to be sung standing, as a sign of reverence and faith. It comes in at the end of Lauds. Every time this joyous sound strikes our ears, let us remember its signification, and thank God. Then, in thinking over all the wonders which Zachary announced to the world, let us think also of his faith; his voice, so long silent, breaks forth in an act of fervent faith, and then, when we remember how severe had been the chastisement with which in his case a single rising of doubt had been visited, we shall be able to see the high value and blessedness of a firm and unwavering faith. Let us be

careful never to doubt any of the truths announced to us in the name of the great God, by His ministers and messengers, who speak to us in His name, as the Angel Gabriel did to Zachary. Has no word contrary to faith ever escaped our lips? Have we never, like Zachary, deserved to have our tongues struck dumb? If God is so merciful to us, let us not abuse His mercy, and thus incur a guilt far greater than that of this holy priest, even in the moment of his unbelief, for at that time the marvels of the Divine goodness, which have been revealed to us, had not yet been made known to him.

“Mary,” continues St. Bonaventure, “after having taken leave of Elizabeth and Zachary, and having blessed St. John, returned to her poor dwelling at Nazareth. And while she makes this journey, her extreme poverty is once more brought before us. In the humble home to which she is returning she will find neither food nor drink, nor any of the necessities of life, for she possessed neither money nor property. She has just spent three months with kinsfolk who were probably in easy circumstances, and she is returning to her

former poverty. She is now reduced once more to provide for her subsistence by the labour of her own hands. Be touched by her necessities, and let your hearts be enkindled by the love of poverty.

Prayer.

O Mary, so gentle and tender towards Elizabeth, so happy in her joys, so sympathising in her sufferings: O Mary, so strong in faith when thou didst press in thine arms the Forerunner of thy Son, and didst hear Zachary announce at the same time the destinies of John and of the Saviour: O Mary, so humble, so calm, so diligent in the poverty of Nazareth, obtain for us, according to the measure of our weakness, the virtues which we learn to love in thee. Teach us active charity, which loves and consoles; lively faith, which accepts and worships the word of God; and an untroubled soul, which receives alike from the Hand of God poverty and abundance. Thou wert the same in the house of the rich Elizabeth and Zachary, and in the poor dwelling at Nazareth. The same joy, far above all

earthly joys, shone forth from thy soul, and enlightened all around thee. O holy Virgin, our model, may the meditation of thy life light up in us a single ray of that charity, and of that faith of which thy soul was the centre, and of which the peace and joy which thou didst shed around thee, were the rays, and may we learn to believe and love like thee, that we may also learn like thee to suffer and to comfort. Amen.

Practice.

To thank God from the bottom of our hearts, with holy Zachary and the Blessed Virgin, every time that we hear the *Benedictus*.

TENTH DAY.

CHRISTMAS.—ADORATION OF THE
SHEPHERDS.

“Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given.”—Isaias ix. 6.

Mary spent in silence and retreat the time which was to pass before the birth of the Saviour. An angel of God visited Joseph in sleep, and made known to him to what high glory God had raised his spouse the Blessed Virgin, and the sacred trust which would soon be placed in their hands. Mary and Joseph, deeply recollected, in the expectation of so great a mystery, prepared themselves by prayer for the incomparable grace of receiving under their roof Him whose glory heaven and earth cannot contain. At that time the Roman Emperor, Augustus Cæsar, desired to know the number of inhabitants contained in his vast empire, which comprised almost the whole of the then known world. He ordered a census to be made

in all the countries under his dominion. And governors arrived in the provinces, cities, and villages. The order was given to the inhabitants of every age and sex to come and be inscribed on that immense list of the subjects of the Roman Empire. Cyrinus, governor of Syria, arrived in Judea. Each one of the enslaved children of Israel was to repair to the town from whence his family drew their origin. Joseph and Mary, as descendants of David, had to go and enrol their names at the place where David their royal ancestor was born, in the humble house of his father Isai or Jesse. What a wonderful thing is this! More than seven hundred years before, God had predicted by His prophet, that in that privileged city of Bethlehem was to be born the Saviour of the world. "And thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda: out of thee shall He come unto Me, that is to be the Ruler in Israel, and His going forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity."* The time being accomplished, Mary and Joseph left

* Micahs v. 2.

their dwelling at Nazareth. Although the day was at hand on which the Blessed Virgin was to bring her Divine Son into the world, she was forced to expose herself to the fatigues of this distant journey. Joseph, whom God had chosen to be the foster-father of His Son, "began that blessed ministry* by accompanying his holy spouse, and by seeking for her places of shelter and rest on this long journey. Obscure and unknown, they came to add their name to the list of the subjects of the empire, and doubtless he who inscribed amongst the descendants of David this young and feeble maiden, and this poor and aged man, smiled in pity at the sight of the depths of humiliation to which the royal race of the Jews had fallen. But the eyes of all heaven were fixed upon this poor maiden. She it was who was about to give to the world the Desire of all Nations. And that magistrate sent by Rome, the unconscious instrument of an earthly power, knew not that he was accomplishing the eternal designs of God in leading to Bethlehem Him who was there to be born for the salvation of the world.

* Bossuet, V. Elevation.

“You princes of the world,” cries the great Bishop Bossuet, “little know what you are doing when you put the whole universe in commotion that a list may be made of all the subjects of your empire ! You wish to know its strength, its tribes, its future soldiers, and you begin to enrol them. It is this, or something similar, that you are about to do. But God has other designs, which you fulfil without knowing it. His Son is to be born in Bethlehem, the humble birthplace of David. He has caused this to be predicted by His prophet, more than seven hundred years ago, and behold, all the world is set in motion to fulfil this prophecy.”*

These humble pilgrims, the depositaries of the treasure for which the world is waiting, which the prophets have announced, reach Bethlehem. In the evening, after a long day of travelling, they reach the deep valley, upon which Bethlehem looks down. From all sides flocks of travellers are going towards the city of David. Joseph hastens the pace of the

* Bossuet, *Elevations sur les Mysteries*.

humble beast that bears Mary. He enters the town, he directs his steps towards the inn, where, according to eastern custom, the poor as well as the rich should find hospitality. "But there was no room for them in the inn," the holy Gospel tells us. Then, rapping at the doors of the city of his fathers, the descendant of David asks for one night's shelter, in order that his young spouse may rest from her weariness. But the houses, like the inns, are invaded by a crowd of travellers. Joseph comes empty-handed, and the doors are shut against him. The shades of a cold winter night are already falling on the inhospitable town, and on the streets full of a stirring crowd, not one of which troubles himself about their distress. Joseph with a heavy heart continues humbly to ask for shelter, and more than once, perhaps, Mary's gentle voice unites with his in vain. Behold them shortly at the outskirts of the town. Has Bethlehem, then, refused to receive her Saviour?

In the side of the mountain, not far from the last houses of the town, is a cavern hewn out of the rock. Joseph and Mary hear the sounds of some domestic

animals within. "This cavern, the entrance of which faces the north, and which grows narrower in the interior, serves as a common stable to the Bethlehemites, and sometimes as a shelter for the shepherds on stormy nights. Mary and Joseph bless God for having guided them to this place of shelter."*

They enter, and there is the sanctuary that Bethlehem has prepared for Him whose predicted birth has been for seven hundred years its glory. And somewhere close to them a doctor of the law, treated by all with reverence, and received with all the attentions of hospitality, is opening the holy books at the page in which is written, "And thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda, out of thee shall He come forth unto Me, that is to be the ruler in Israel."† It is of this same Ruler in Israel that another prophet has said: "He shall grow up as a tender plant before Him, and as a root out of a thirsty ground. There is no beauty in Him, nor comeliness; and

* Vie de la Sainte Vierge, par l'Abbe Orsini.

† Micheas v. 2.

we have seen Him, and there was no sightliness that we should be desirous of Him : despised, and the most abject of men, a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief.”* He Himself will one day say: “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His Head.”† In this stable, on this cold night, Mary “brought forth her first-born Son,” says the Gospel, “and wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

Behold, then, the expected Saviour, the little Infant, the Son of God, made man, who is given to us. He whom the Holy Scriptures called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. A poor little Infant, moaning and weeping with the cold, like our own. Behold how, for the love of us, the Almighty God hath humbled Himself ! Mary makes Him swaddling clothes from her veils, her virginal hands wrap them round Him to protect Him from the night wind ; then in a hollow of the rock, where

* Isaias liii. 2-3.

† St. Luke ix. 38.

the ground sinks at the extremity of the cavern, and where the shepherds have thrown down a little straw, which the animals have warmed with their breath, the Blessed Virgin lays her new-born Child. This is the cradle of the Infant God.

Who are now His first worshippers? Near the manger, her heart trembling with love and reverence, Mary worships her Son, whom she knows to be her God. A Father of the Church thus renders her first prayer: "What shall I call Thee?" says she. "A mortal?—but I conceived Thee by Divine operation.....A God? but Thou hast a human body. Shall I come to Thee with incense, or offer Thee my milk? Shall I lavish on Thee all the cares of a tender mother, or serve Thee with my brow in the dust? O wondrous thought! the heavens are Thy dwelling, and I rock Thee on my knee! Thou art on the earth, and Thou art not separated from the inhabitants of the heavenly realms. The heavens are with Thee."* Prostrate by Mary's side before the manger, Joseph worships his God with all the

* St. Basil.

ardour of his soul, and at the same time adopting the feeble Infant lying before him, with fatherly tenderness, he engages to serve and love Him, and to defend Him, at any cost, from suffering and danger.

In the meantime, at the foot of the hill of Bethlehem, some shepherds were guarding their flocks in the valley. They were devout children of Israel, "imitators of the holy patriarchs, and the most innocent and simple company in the world."* "They were keeping the night watches over their flock," says the holy Gospel, "and behold an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the brightness of God shone round about them, and they feared with a great fear. And the angel said to them: Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people. For this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. And this shall be a sign unto you: you shall find the Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly

* Bossuet, Elevations sur les Mysteres.

army, praising God, and saying : Glory be to God in the highest : and on earth peace to men of good will. And it came to pass, after the angels departed from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another : Let us go over to Bethlehem, and let us see this word that is come to pass, which the Lord had shewed to us. And they came with haste. And they found Mary and Joseph, and the Infant lying in the manger. And seeing, they understood of the word that had been spoken to them concerning this Child. And all that heard wondered : and at those things that were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God, for all the things they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.”*

“ A few poor shepherds, the most innocent and simple company in the world.” These were, with Mary and Joseph, the first worshippers of God made man. The Doctors of the Law remained in their blindness, and the mighty ones of the

* St. Luke ii. 8-20.

earth in their pride. Those whom God first called to His crib were the poor, men of simple heart, men of good will. Rejoice, my brethren, you the poor whom God loves, whom we also love because you were His first friends. See our Lord calls the humble to Himself, and raises them from their low estate.

Do you then return, like shepherds of Bethlehem, praising and glorifying God, and ask from Him how to render your poverty great and holy, like that of Joseph and Mary, dear to God, like that of the shepherds of Bethlehem. Sing with the angels, "Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will." And know beforehand that it is in these words, upon which we shall meditate together, that this great secret is contained. And then, while pondering in your hearts the lessons of the holy Christmas nights, picture to yourselves the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God and our Mother, going from door to door, asking from the inhabitants of Bethlehem a shelter which they refuse to her. Never see a mother, an old man, and a little child poorer than yourselves, without see-

ing in them Mary, Joseph, and the Infant Jesus. Never let your poverty close your heart to the poverty of others. Which one of you was ever so poor as Mary and Joseph, without shelter and bread, on Christmas night? "Which one of you, however poor he may be, gives his children a manger for a cradle? Jesus is the only one whom we see thus abandoned, and it is by this mark that He desires to be recognised."

Prayer.

O Mary, meek and obedient in thy journey to Bethlehem, patient and resigned when no house opened to give thee shelter, obtain for us humble obedience and resignation in suffering and in desolation. O Mary, kneeling before the manger, obtain for us humility in joy as in suffering, and above all, a spark of Thy love for Jesus. Make us understand and love the Divine teaching of the manger. Give us a place among the souls of good will, to whom thy Divine Son has brought peace. O holy Mother, obtain for us the faith of

the shepherds of Bethlehem; so that in all simplicity we may bring to Jesus our humble presents, our hearts, the poverty of which we know, but which we desire to give wholly to Him. Amen.

Practice.

To come often in spirit to the manger, with the shepherds of Bethlehem.

ELEVENTH DAY.

ADORATION OF THE MAGI.

"We have seen His star in the East, and are come to adore Him."—St. Matt. ii. 2.

Let us return to the stable at Bethlehem; there we have worshipped our Saviour laid on the straw of the manger; we have knelt by the side of the shepherds, His first friends, we have united our thanksgivings with theirs, when they "returned praising and glorifying God for all the things they had heard and seen."

Let us return there this evening, and let us kneel once more in this poor shelter in which the Lord of the universe passed the first days of His life. Let us contemplate the Blessed Virgin, now seated on the dry rock of the grotto, holding her new-born Son in her arms, and soothing His first sufferings; now kneeling near the manger, looking at the Divine Infant as He sleeps, with a tenderness, mingled

with wondering reverence. Let us remain near her ; and ask her to teach us to love the Infant Jesus, and to listen to all that He teaches us from this humble crib. This sweet Infant, the Eternal Word of God made man for us, cannot yet speak ; the voice which commands the thunder, and says to the waves of the sea, " thus far thou shalt go, and no farther," can now only utter a feeble wail. And yet what inspired tongue could tell us all that He tells us ?

Do we not, as it were, breathe at the feet of Jesus and Mary charity without bounds, voluntary poverty, undeserved suffering, love and pardon for all ? Is it possible not to love God, seeing how much He has loved us ? Is it possible not to love our neighbour, when we consider that this gentle Saviour came into the world for him as well as for us, that it is His will that we should all be brothers, and that we should love our brethren as He has loved us ? Can we complain and fret at our sufferings, alas ! too well merited, when we see the Lamb without spot born in poverty, and suffering and weeping in the manger of a stable.

We all love the house in which our fathers were born. When a man, after having made a journey, returns to his native village, the sight of the paternal roof, however poor it may be, brings the tears into his eyes. What then must be the sight or even the thought of the crib, to us who are born the children of God and of the Church? Happy the Christian who is able to cross the seas, and to kneel at the place in which the Saviour was born! At the extreme end of the village of Bethlehem, below the grotto in which Joseph and Mary found shelter, stands an ancient church, built more than fifteen hundred years ago, by St. Helena, mother of the first Christian Emperor of Rome. Helena was an illustrious servant of God, whose virtue had inspired her son with a reverence for Christianity, and who only made use of her earthly greatness to work without ceasing for the deliverance of the Church, and for the propagation of the faith. Her first care, when the persecutions ceased, was to erect sanctuaries in all the places in Judea already consecrated by the memory of the life and Pas-

sion of our Saviour. The Christians had already built over the stable at Bethlehem a chapel, which a heathen emperor had dared to pull down, and to place in its stead an abominable idol. But the triumph of brute force over the Church of God is never of long duration. St. Helena destroyed the idol, and rebuilt with still greater magnificence the sanctuary of the Nativity. Here pilgrims are received as brothers by Franciscan friars; conducted by one of them, the Christian of our day goes down into the underground chapel which is under the sanctuary of the church, with a taper in his hand. Here the light of day cannot penetrate, but thirty-two silver lamps hanging from the roof burn night and day before the altar. All the kings of Christendom have thought it an honour to send a lamp to the grotto of Bethlehem, and one of the most beautiful which burns on the marble slab near the altar, fastened to the rock, was given by one of the Kings of France. Here it is that the pilgrim prostrates himself with an emotion which I shall not attempt to describe, for under the altar, on the pavement of the Grotto, worked in the most

precious marbles, are the words, "Here Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary."

But let us, who are not able to pray in this sanctuary, take heart; for the Divine Sun which rose out of the stable at Bethlehem, has shed its beams over the whole earth. Let us be of good cheer, for the heart which has learnt to love the Infant Jesus, has learnt thereby how to go to Him without difficulty, how to find Him in the humble shelter which faith and devotion have turned into a temple, since He brought these virtues on the earth. When He came into the world, the rocks and the bare ground were naked and cold like the souls of men. Mary and Joseph alone, whilst they protected His feeble limbs from the severity of winter, cheered by the fervour of their love the Redeemer whom the world was already denying and rejecting. Let us join our love to theirs. Let us tell our gentle Saviour that He has not come into this world for ungrateful hearts alone, that we will not be of the number of those who still daily abandon Him.

It was not for one night alone that the

Grotto of Bethlehem sheltered the Holy Family. According to the custom among Jewish women, Mary was to stay there forty days. "Joseph," says St. Bonaventura, "closed the entrance as best he could, to protect the Mother and the Child from the winter wind: and the dark rock became a sanctuary such as the earth had never before possessed."

Now the third day after the birth of our Saviour, the heavens were suddenly kindled with an unwonted light; a brilliant star, appearing first on the extremity of the horizon, seemed to advance in the skies, and illuminate the plain. Then, from afar, on the road which leads from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, was seen appearing a long train of travellers. Horsemen, and camels laden with luggage, shewed themselves on the plain. At the head of the procession appeared men clothed in rich garments of foreign fashion. Both horses and riders were covered with dust, and seemed tired after a long journey. Three of these strangers, whom their noble features marked as the leaders, with their heads uplifted towards the star, seemed to seek no other guide, and hastened in the

direction in which it seemed to move before them. All of a sudden a wonderful brightness surrounded the Hill of David; the travellers climbed it, and entered the city, traversed it without stopping, and without answering the astonished looks of the crowd. Sinking, while they watched it, from the height of the heavens, the star had stopped above a cave which seemed to be a rustic stable. Immediately, without hesitating, the strangers stopped, and dismounting, prepared to ask at this strange palace for the King whom they came to seek.

We can imagine the wonder which Joseph and Mary must have felt when they heard the noise of this crowd, and saw this heavenly light shine upon their poor dwelling. Mary took her Divine Son in her arms, and retired to the recesses of the Grotto. The strangers entered the stable; they prostrated themselves before the Infant God; they worshipped Him with their foreheads in the dust. If we open the Gospel we shall learn who are these new worshippers.

“When Jesus, therefore, was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King

Herod, behold there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East, and are come to adore Him. And King Herod, hearing this, was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And assembling together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where Christ should be born. But they said to him: In Bethlehem of Juda. For so it is written by the prophet: *And thou, Bethlehem, the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda; for out of thee shall come forth the Captain that shall rule My people Israel.* Then Herod, privately calling the wise men, learned diligently of them the time of the star which appeared to them, and sending them into Bethlehem, said: Go, and diligently inquire after the Child, and when you have found Him, bring me word again, that I may also come and adore Him. And when they had heard the King they went their way; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. And seeing

the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And entering into the house, they found the Child, with Mary His Mother, and falling down, they adored Him; and opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts; gold, frankincense and myrrh."

These magi were great and venerable men, to whom learning had made known the truth, without filling their hearts with that pride which shuts out the inspirations of God. They came, it is said, from that ancient land of the Chaldees, from whence had come Abraham, in which Jacob had kept the flocks of his uncle Laban, and in which the passage of the patriarchs had left a remembrance of the true God. Pagan superstitions had indeed been mingled with it; the inhabitants of Chaldea were wont to observe the course of the stars, and confounding little by little the Creator with the creature, they had come at last to worship the sun as king of the heavens, and fire as an emanation from the sun. They believed that by a close observation of the position of the stars in the sky they could read in them the different events of the lives of men; and as they had mingled idolatry with the recol-

lection of the true God, so they mingled gross superstitions with their true science.

From the most ancient times we find amongst them men celebrated for their learning, to whom the people attributed a kind of power, and one of the most interesting narratives in the Bible proves to us that there may have been those among them who were led to the knowledge of the true God by a more complete learning, or by a nobler nature. When the Israelites, having left Egypt, were led over the desert by the Lord, and arrived at the boundary of the promised land, the people who occupied their inheritance were troubled. Balac, the King of the Moabites, sent to bring from afar Balaam, one of the sages of Chaldea, to avert the danger by cursing the Children of Israel. Balaam was about to start, when God spoke to him in his sleep, saying : "Thou shalt not curse the people, because it is blessed." The King of the Moabites sent again to Balaam, promising him riches and honours. For an instant the temptation was too strong, and he set forth ; but an angel stopped him, and commanded him to say nothing but what God should

put in his mouth, and when Balaam reached the Princes of Moab, the fear of the Lord mastered both the fears and hopes of this world. "How," he cried, "shall I curse him whom God has not cursed? By what means should I detest him whom the Lord detesteth not?..... I was brought to bless, the blessing I am not able to hinder." Four different times he blessed the people of God in spite of the growing anger of Balac. How beautiful are thy tabernacles, O Jacob, and thy tents, O Israel!..... He announced to the trembling Moabites around him, the approaching victories of those whom he was not able to curse; and as if God revealed to him the most wonderful secrets of futurity in proportion as he obeyed Him, the sage became a prophet, and hailed from afar the Messias promised to Abraham. "I shall see Him," he says, "but not now; I shall behold Him, but not near. A *star shall rise* up out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall spring up from Israel, and shall strike the chiefs of Moab, and shall waste all the children of Seth... but Israel shall do manfully. Out of Jacob shall He come that shall rule.".....

We may well believe that the remembrance of this prophecy was preserved in the country of the Chaldees. Long afterwards the Children of Israel were led captive into the very country of Balaam. On the banks of the Babylonian rivers the prophets of the true God called the people to repentance, and promised them pardon for their ingratitude, and the coming of the Saviour. Daniel, one of the greatest of these prophets, he who announced the precise time at which the Saviour was to be given to the world, was revered at the court of King Nabuchodonosor for his great learning as well as for his great virtues. He rose very high in the favour of this haughty king, whom he boldly reproved for his pride, and was appointed by him head of the magi. This was the name given to the depositories of that science of which the Chaldeans were so proud, the priests of their religion, the men who preserved the history and the traditions of the kingdom, whose advice was respectfully asked on all important occasions. When, after Nabuchodonosor's death, the impious Balthasar had drawn down upon himself the anger of God, and

when in the middle of a banquet an invisible hand traced upon the wall the condemnation of the guilty king, Daniel was called in to read it. And the same night Cyrus entered Babylon, and accomplished the vengeance of God. He revered Daniel, who had predicted his coming, and who shewed him this prophecy of Isaias, written more than a hundred years before: "I say to Cyrus, thou art My shepherd, and thou shalt perform all My pleasure. I say to Jerusalem, thou shalt be built; and to the temple, thy foundation shall be laid..... I will subdue nations before his face, and turn the backs of kings, and open the doors before him." And Cyrus, accomplishing the will of God, restored the people of God to liberty and honour. We cannot be surprised that the recollection of these miracles had remained in the country itself in which they had been accomplished; that the magi had kept the memory of Daniel's prophecy, and of the four hundred and ninety years which were to pass before the coming of the Saviour, before the rising of the star predicted of old by Balaam, and that the

expectation common to all the nations of the earth was still more lively amongst them. When at last the true star announced by the prophets rose in the stable at Bethlehem, God permitted the appearance in the heavens of a new and miraculous star, which attracted the attention of the magi of Chaldea. Three amongst them were found whose hearts were strong enough in faith, love of truth, and courageous obedience, to answer to His call, and to follow the mysterious star without thinking of the perils of the journey. "A star which appeared only to the eyes," says the great Bishop Bossuet, "would not have sufficed to draw the magi to the new-born King. It was necessary that the star of Jacob and the light of Christ should rise in their hearts. While He gave them an external sign, God touched their hearts by that inspiration of which Jesus said: 'No man can come to Me, except the Father, who hath sent Me, draw him.' "*"

Let us here find our lesson for to-night. Can Christians, on whom the star of the

* Bossuet, *Elev. sur les Myst.*, iii. *Elev.* 17 semaine.

Saviour has shone from their earliest days, be less devoted to their faith than these strangers, who saw His light shine suddenly in the midst of the darkness of idolatry? As soon as they recognised the star, these strangers left their home; they crossed deserts, mountains, and torrents swelled by the winter rains; nothing stopped them. And we, on the contrary, by what trifles do we allow ourselves to be hindered from following the call of God, the inspiration of conscience, the star of the Saviour, which shines in us? There is not one among us who does not hear within him this call of God in his time of need, and if we neglect it, it is because it is drowned in the din of earthly passions, because the mists of earth arise to obscure the brightness of the star. Let us then take courage, and in imitation of the magi let us follow the call without fear. Were there not many voices in their distant land dissuading them from this long journey? Did not the clouds more than once hide the star from them? Let us say to our gentle Saviour: We have seen Thy star, and we are come; we saw it, and we set out.

But whither? This we know not as yet; let us begin by leaving the land of our birth, that is, the corrupt nature in which we were born; let us follow God everywhere, even where it becomes difficult, even where great faith and great efforts are required. Let us never be discouraged, or murmur if our toil seems poorly rewarded, or even if the result seems contrary to our expectations. In the same way that the Eternal Word was hidden under the appearance of a poor child to the eyes of the magi, so may a great grace be hidden under the appearance of a failure, a blessing under that of a misfortune. Take courage then: when God calls us, it is the tenderest of Fathers calling His children. Never will weariness be more magnificently recompensed than that which we may suffer in following His voice.

Prayer.

Holy Virgin, who art called the morning star, whose humble apparition made way for the rising of the Sun of Justice, may thy gentle and pure light lead us in our

turn to the cradle of the Saviour. Fill us with the faith and obedience of these great ones of the earth, who came from afar. Teach us to offer, like them, to thy Divine Infant, the gold of love, the incense of prayer, and the myrrh of repentance. We are not kings, but a heart animated with thy love contains treasures of charity more precious and more powerful than gold. We place them at the feet of Jesus, to consecrate them to His service, and to the service of our brethren.

Inspire us with those fervent prayers which rise up to God like the smoke of incense, and which are so agreeable to Him when presented by thee. And as the myrrh which served for the embalming of the dead, is the emblem of repentance, by which we die to sin, teach us to strip ourselves of our passions, our evil feelings, and our bad habits, and to present ourselves to thy Divine Son with the humble and contrite heart which He will never despise. Such are the gifts which the most humble of His children offer to the Infant Jesus. Receive them, holy Virgin, as thou didst receive those of the magi, and may we, like them, return strengthened

and purified to our homes by another road, leaving the paths of sin to follow those of virtue.

Practice.

To answer quickly to the call of God, and never to fear either weariness or sacrifices in the accomplishment of a duty.

TWELFTH DAY.

RICH AND POOR AT THE MANGER.

“*Come to Me, all....*”—St. Matt. ix. 28.

Amongst the inhabitants of Bethlehem who daily passed the stable in which Jesus was born, there were some who, believing the account of the shepherds, and the words of the Angel, visited Jesus and Mary with reverence; brought them humble presents to relieve their poverty, looked with faith on the Divine Infant, to whom each day added fresh graces, and sincerely placed all their hopes in Him. But there were others, alas! who, treating the miracles of Christmas night as dreams, passed the stable with indifference, and stood stupified in amazement to see the Eastern Kings kneeling before this poor Infant and His Mother. There were many who came through curiosity, and looking upon Jesus understood nothing, for their hearts were cold. They came to the manger wanting in good will,

and they returned without faith and without hope.

It is not these whom we desire to imitate, but those just, those true friends of the Infant Saviour. Whether they be shepherds of Bethlehem, or magi from the east, we desire to take for our example all those who came to the crib with their hearts filled with *good will*. Let us in our hearts ask the Blessed Virgin our Mother to obtain for us from God that *good will*, without which the mind cannot be opened to the teaching of faith, and then let us together seek to know the great lesson which the Saviour of the world is pleased to teach us at His crib, in showing us, first the shepherds of Bethlehem, and then the wise kings, worshipping Him on His entrance into human life, the burden of which He deigned to take upon Himself for our sakes.

What is this great, this first lesson? Need I say that it is the love of poverty, humility, and suffering? Why was Almighty God, on coming down from heaven, pleased to clothe Himself in the most frail of all forms, in that of a new-born infant? Why was it the will of Him who

created all the marvels of heaven and earth to be born in poverty, and to pass thirty years in the house of an obscure carpenter? Why was it His will to live a life of labour, and to die in the most unspeakable suffering? Why, except that it was His will to be our example and our hope in all our sufferings. And see, who are those chosen ones to whom God first makes known the birth of His beloved Son? Who will first be called to surround the crib of the King of Israel? Are they those who are called great and rich on the earth? No: the Gospel tells us that they were poor shepherds, who were keeping the night watches, guarding their flocks. These men it was, who, with simple hearts and humble faith, left their flock in the fields, and, bringing some fruits and the milk of their goats as an offering, came with joy to the manger at Bethlehem, and recognized and worshipped their God in the poor infant whom they there found. It was the poor, then, to whom the Angel of the Lord first brought the tidings of great joy. It is the poor who came first to honour the crib of their Saviour. The poor are the

first friends of Jesus Christ. This truth, which forms part of our faith, we shall find in every page of the Holy Scriptures. Daniel and the prophets, in announcing the Saviour of the world, announced above all the friend and deliverer of the poor. "The Lord is become a refuge for the poor.* He hath not forgotten the cry of the poor."† "By reason of the misery of the needy, and the groans of the poor, now will I arise, saith the Lord."‡ "Let the poor see and rejoice."§ "The poor shall eat and shall be filled."|| "Who is as the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high : raising up the needy from the earth, and lifting up the poor out of the dunghill, that He may place him with princes, with the princes of His people?"¶ Such passages are too numerous to quote ; the two first canticles which announced to the earth the coming of the Saviour, the *Magnificat* and the *Benedictus*, are filled with this deliverance of the poor, and the Gospel never ceases to confirm these promises, and sums them all up in

* Ps. ix.

† Ibid.

‡ Ps. xi.

§ Ps. lxxviii.

|| Ps. xxi.

¶ Ps. cxii.

those immortal words: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."* Blessed, then, are the poor, for they received the first blessings of our Saviour! Blessed are the poor, whose holy sufferings remind us of those of our God made man! Blessed are the poor who have the privilege of being called the suffering members of Jesus Christ! But to deserve these blessings of our Saviour, and to have a share in these special favours, is it sufficient to be poor in this world? This is the great question, and the Gospel has answered it long ago. Were all the poor of Bethlehem called to the manger? Alas, no. The dwellings of the poor were not open to receive the Holy Family, any more than those of the rich, and there were only a small number of shepherds, who came at the voice of the angel, to worship the Infant Jesus. Afterwards, when Jesus was pleased to drink for us the chalice of His bitter Passion, were there not some of the poor amongst those who

* St. Matt. v.

cried out against Him, "Crucify Him! crucify Him!" and who asked to have Barabbas released to them instead of their Saviour? Yes! there were amongst that ungrateful multitude some of those poor whom Jesus had so much loved, to whom He was come to bring hope and salvation. Doubtless they were led on and deceived by men who should have been their guides and instructors; but Jesus, their teacher beyond all others, had been long amongst them; they had seen the miracles of His charity and sweetness; and still they had been so base of heart as to forsake Him, and to curse and insult Him in His hour of anguish. What means this contradiction? Why do we find the faithful-hearted poor worshipping Jesus in His crib, and the ungrateful loading Him with insults on the Way of Sorrows to Calvary? Why do we find Eastern kings, rich and great, on the earth at the manger, and afterwards see the rich and powerful persecuting Jesus with sacrilegious hatred, and outraging Him even on the cross? Is it not because poverty and riches do not of themselves make either the good or the evil of this world: because

they can be, each in their place, good and serviceable, or evil and fruitless, as they are used according to the will of God, or turned to ill by our evil inclinations and selfish passions? Blessed were the devout shepherds of Bethlehem, who believed in the word of the Angel, and came with lively faith to worship the Infant God! Blessed, likewise, the holy magian kings, who followed the star, and crossed deserts and mountains, to come to the manger at Bethlehem! And blessed all men of good will, who accomplish, each in their own place, the task which God has given them in this world! Our Saviour has said: "In My Father's house there are many mansions."* Each one will there be received, according to his merits, and in the house of our loving God, there is room for all His children. There are many different paths by which to reach it; and blessed are those who attain it, and are able to offer to the God of mercy the merits of a holy life well ended! Not one of these will see the door shut against him. This truth, like the other, is part of our Faith, and all the truths taught us by

* St. John xiv.

our Saviour, far from clashing or contradicting, only confirm one another; it only puts in its true light that which at first sight it would seem to contradict. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," our Saviour has said, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." We all repeat these words after Him, with the same Faith and the same Hope. But the time is come to understand rightly what is this poverty which Jesus Christ has blessed; this way, salutary though sown with thorns, the shortest and the best by which to reach heaven.

Our Saviour said, not only, "Blessed are the poor," but "blessed are the poor in spirit!" What is it to be poor in spirit? Does it consist in being poor, because we are born poor, and cannot help it? This is nothing but a simple fact, and becomes a merit only if we know how to accept poverty courageously, and to bear it holily. Poverty, unless accepted with Christian resignation, is fruitless suffering. It bears no fruit, either for this world or the next; and the enemy of our salvation, who knows how to choose with perfidious art the temptation most

dangerous for each one of us, too often instils bitterness, envy, and hate into the hearts of the poor, in order to nip, as it were, in its flower, the fruit of that poverty, which, well borne, would have gained heaven.

Far be from me the thought of destroying the merit of poverty, and of taking from him who suffers so cruelly in this world, the comforting thought that he is the friend of Jesus Christ, and will have the highest place near Him in heaven; but let us take heed, not to confound with the poverty blessed by our Saviour, that hateful and rebellious poverty which sees with envy the goods of this world, which detests those to whom God has confided them as a trust and a charge, and which, in the senseless violence of its aspirations after an imaginary happiness, has only bitter feelings towards God and towards its neighbour. To be poor in spirit is to be detached from worldly goods; it is to look upon riches, whether in our own hands, or those of our brethren, merely as a means of serving God by charity and almsdeeds; it is to accept poverty, if God lays it upon us, as a means of serving

Him by obedience and resignation. If this be the poverty which our Saviour has blessed, which He has recommended to us all, even as the price of the kingdom of heaven, which is the nearest to God, the rich man who looks upon his goods as a trust, who esteems them only because they give him the means of serving God and doing good to his brethren, or the poor man who hates his brother in Jesus Christ, simply because he possesses that which his envy covets ?

No doubt many rich men do not understand their mission in this world. There are many who have not in their hearts that contempt for their perishable goods, and that love of the poor, which is necessary for their salvation. This, alas ! is but too true ; as it is also true that many of the poor love the goods of this world, and are in their hearts attached to them, even though they possess them not.

Such were the lessons which it was our Saviour's will to teach us, even from the beginning of the Gospel, in showing us the poor shepherds praying and worshipping Him in His crib, and the rich and powerful kings laying their treasures at

His feet. The difference between the shepherds and the kings, so great in the eyes of men, was nothing in the eyes of God. They resembled one another in heart. The same Faith, the same Charity, led them to the crib of Jesus. But, from the very first, our gracious God gave the better part to the poor. The shepherds of Bethlehem were at the very gates of the town. When warned by the voice of the Angel, they had only a few steps to walk on that blessed night, in order to reach the feet of their Saviour. The magi, on the contrary, seeing the star shine, and knowing by divine revelation that their Saviour was come, had to take a long and perilous journey before they could find Him. They had to cross mountains and deserts, and to travel day and night, to reach Bethlehem. Those whom God has placed in a high position, have in this world a more difficult journey than the poor. Their way is less straight; it is more full of snares and precipices; and as much more has been given to them, so much more will be required of them. Let us then pray for them. If the poor have in this world more sufferings and wants,

the rich also have their sorrows and pains, which the poor know not, and which spare them no more than the other children of Adam, and it is sometimes not the least of their sufferings to see themselves not loved by those whose happiness they desire to promote, and whose salvation they would procure at any cost of trouble to themselves. The poor must not envy the rich, but when their poverty seems heaviest, they should think on those words of our divine Saviour: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven! Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Let us, then, be poor in spirit. All we need do is to offer to God with good will the trials which we cannot escape. Let us offer all our most simple daily actions to our loving Jesus, the friend of the poor, who from His infancy suffered and toiled like ourselves. We shall thus take many thorns from our daily sufferings, for bitterness and hate increase grief, as vinegar and gall inflame a wound. We shall then be those men of good will, to whom the Angel of the Lord promised peace, on that blessed night in

which our Saviour was born for us all. How must we be men of good will? We must have ever in our hearts the will to serve God; and never perform an action, small or great, which we cannot offer to God. Oh, how much sweeter would our life become, if we had this salutary thought ever before our eyes. What peace should we find in our sufferings, even in those most painful to us.

We know that the life of the Blessed Virgin is the brightest example of the poverty which is pleasing to God, and which God blesses. Brought up in the temple, far from suffering and toil, she accepted it as a precious gift, when she united her life with that of the humble Joseph. Truly poor in spirit, she loved poverty as a veil, as a means of making for herself, in the midst of the world, a blessed solitude, in which all her thoughts went to God, in which all her actions were still for God, while she shed around her spouse and her Son that serene atmosphere of domestic happiness which poverty does not exclude. Wives and mothers of families, strive to be like the Blessed Virgin Mary. If, like her, you would make

at the domestic hearth a solitude in which devoted and constant labour brings happiness, into which bitterness never penetrates, in which smiles and peace, and forgiveness, if needed, is ever to be found, your husbands and sons, even though far from resembling St. Joseph and the Infant Jesus, would soon come to accept their toilsome existence, and perhaps to love it. In all the sufferings brought on you by your poverty, turn with confidence to Mary. She understands them all. When a mother sees the smallest and weakest of her children suffering and weary, weeping and stretching out their hands towards her, does she not lift them in her arms, and warm them in her bosom, while she wipes their tears away ?

We well know that Mary's tenderness for us surpasses that of any mother, and the more suffering are her children, the more readily does she listen to their voice when they call, the more readily does she receive them into her motherly arms, warm them at her bosom, and lavish on them the treasures of her love. Let us then take courage ; for life is short, and heaven is beautiful ! This is but a

sorrowful journey for us all. Let us pray together, let us pray for one another, and let us ask Mary to guide our steps towards the country which awaits us, where faithful hearts will find their place with the God of mercy, whose will it is that we all should call Him our Father.

Prayer.

O Mary! what must have been thy holy joy when thou didst for the first time hear thy Son hailed by men by the name of Saviour, of Christ, and of Lord! Thou didst receive in silence the words of the angels, related by poor shepherds, and thou didst keep in thy heart all these wonders. The poor and lowly ones, who first brought thee this joy must be thy most special friends; the poor and lowly herdsmen and labourers are gathered together to-day before thee, at the crib of thy Son, offering Him their worship and their prayers, and humbly asking to be received and listened to, as were the happy shepherds of Bethlehem. But others also, seemingly more favoured on this earth, possessing in different degrees the goods

of fortune, according as it has pleased our heavenly Father to distribute them, are prostrate not less humbly at thy feet.

United together, and instructed, no longer by angels and the star, but by the Church, we hail in this feeble Infant, lying on straw, the Saviour of the world, Christ our common Lord and Master, come to ransom us all by His Blood, and to bring to us all the new law of grace and charity.

And thou, Mary, whom He has chosen to be His Mother, we ask thee to be also our common Mother; and as we are all brothers in the blood of Jesus Christ, as we are all brothers in thy arms, teach us to love one another as brothers.

Teach us to keep, like thee, in our hearts, the remembrance of the wonders which we have heard to-day. Grant that, happy in the knowledge that a Saviour is born to us, we may prepare our souls to receive the teaching, and faithfully to obey the precepts of this gracious Master.

Practice.

To serve God, each one in his own place, and to believe that the position in which God has placed us is the best for the salvation of our soul. All to become brothers through our common love of Jesus.

THIRTEENTH DAY.

THE PRESENTATION—NUNC DIMITTIS.

Under the Jewish law it was the custom for a woman who had brought a child into the world to remain in her house for forty days ; she was not to appear in public until she had been to the temple, where the high priest blessed her, and offered for her the prayers and sacrifices prescribed by the law. Christian women, in the same spirit, go to seek at the foot of the altar the same blessing for themselves and for their new-born babes ; but the Christian, happier than the Jewish mother, offers to God a child purified from original sin by the saving waters of baptism.

The Jewish law also ordained that the first-born son of each family should be offered to the Lord by a particular consecration. After having laid her treasure at the feet of the priest, the Jewish mother offered to the Lord pure victims in ex-

change for this son, whom she was then permitted to take back, to bring him up in the love of God, to whom he was consecrated from his birth. "When the days of her purification are expired," said the law, "she shall offer to the Lord a young lamb of a year old, for a holocaust, and two turtle doves or two pigeons."*

When the mother was poor, she offered the turtle doves or pigeons alone, in exchange for her son, and in Mary's hands these little birds were to become the ransom of the Son of the Eternal God. Forty days after the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, the Jews who were going in and out of the courts of the Temple, saw some humble travellers draw near. There was an old man, followed by a young mother carrying in her arms a new-born child. They were poorly clad, but her countenance beamed with a beautiful and heavenly majesty, and the Child sleeping on her bosom was more beautiful than all the children of men, more beautiful than the faces of the angels which Christian mothers fancy they see leaning over the cradles

* Levit. xii. 6.

of their sons. In the recollected countenance of the old man might be read a reverential tenderness for the two feeble beings confided to his care, and a solemn emotion as he placed his foot on the threshold of the temple; the humble son of David, the poor artizan of Nazareth, was going to offer to God, in His sanctuary, the Son of this true God Himself, and of the most pure Virgin, who had just given Him to the world. She whom the Lord had preserved from her birth from the smallest stain submitted to the law, like the lowest daughter of Eve. Arrayed in the sight of heaven and earth in her divine maternity, she came to purify herself in the temple according to the law of the Jews, as if she were not the lily without spot, whose purity had been celebrated by all the prophets. And the Divine Infant, the Eternal Son of the Father, sent by Him for the salvation of the world, not distinguished from the crowd of the children of men, was about to be offered to His Father, like an ordinary victim, and redeemed by His Mother by the offering appointed for the poorest among the people. The humble Joseph

carried the two white turtle doves to be offered in ransom for the Redeemer of the world. When we feel tempted, in the changes of our lives, to revolt against the position in which Providence has placed us, to imagine that we deserve more than we have, or to look upon ourselves as victims unjustly persecuted by fate, let us think of the Queen of Angels submitting humbly to the law which was not made for her, and of the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world, ransomed at the price of two turtle doves.

“And behold there was a man in Jerusalem,” says the Evangelist St. Luke, “named Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was in him. And he had received an answer from the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord.”*

Moved by the Holy Ghost, he came into the Temple. There he waited, full of hope, for the light of Israel, which his aged eyes were to see before they closed

* St. Luke, ii. 25-26.

in death; and now the holy travellers have entered the courts of the Temple. Several mothers, carrying in their arms their new-born babes, come to kneel at the feet of the high priest, who blesses them and receives their offerings.*

Nothing is heard save the accents of prayer, mingled with the feeble voices of the children. At this moment Simeon, warned by the secret inspiration which brought him to meet his Lord, perceived in the midst of the crowd Mary kneeling humbly in the lowest place, a mysterious glory surrounds the head of the Infant, and is reflected on that of His Mother. Simeon's heart beat in his breast. It is the promised Redeemer, the Christ of the Lord, He who was announced by the prophets, whom the just of all times had expected.

Trembling with joy and reverence, he takes the Child from the arms of His Mother, he raises his hoary head towards heaven, and his voice, restored as in youth, intones this beautiful canticle of thanksgiving: "Now Thou dost dismiss

* St. Bonaventure, Meditations.

Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word, in peace. Because mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel." What a subject of meditation is given us in this aged saint! With what emotions must his canticle of joy fill every heart that loves Jesus! He was approaching the end of a long life, the whole of which had been spent in waiting for the consolation of Israel. He had asked it of the Lord in all his prayers, without impatience or discouragement, for "the Holy Ghost was in him," the Gospel tells us, and the Holy Ghost had told him that he should not die till "he had seen the Christ of the Lord." And we, who know this deliverance, for which Simeon waited without knowing it, ought we not to wait without murmuring a whole life-time, till it may please our divine Saviour to reveal Himself to us, and to give us the true consolation of Israel, the sight of His glory in the eternal kingdom, if through His grace we shall have deserved it?

Besides, are not we more fortunate than

Simeon? Have we not Jesus to help us to wait, or rather, does not Jesus Himself wait for us? Do we not find Him in His sanctuary every time we enter it, moved by that inspiration of the Holy Ghost, without which we can do no good work, not even, says St. Paul, devoutly pronounce His name? Alas! the greater number of the faithful go to pray to Him only at prescribed times, constrained, so to speak, by His merciful law, which obliges us to do that which is for our good. But do we ever think of the constant presence of our Saviour amongst us? At all hours of the day, whilst we are occupied with the cares of earth, or distracted by worldly interests, He is waiting for us in the tabernacle, at all hours of the night, He is watching while we sleep. And if sometimes we have entered an empty church, and have knelt at the foot of the altar before which a lamp was burning, have we not felt in the great silence of the sanctuary an all-powerful peace take possession of our souls? Whether we went in joy to thank God, in need to ask a grace, or in sorrow to seek consolation, have we not felt that our

Master and Friend was there to hear us, to give us His grace, and to comfort us ? As we finish our prayer, could not we also say : “ Now, my God, lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, because I have found my Saviour, and have understood His presence as truly as if mine eyes had seen Him in His mother’s arms.” This is not all. If it was given to Simeon to see our Divine Saviour with his eyes, to take Him in his arms, and press Him to his heart, is it not given to us happy children of the Church to receive Him within our lips and into our souls ? If the aged saint asked to die after having seen the Infant God, what would he have said if he had known that this same Saviour, veiling His Divinity no longer under the appearance of a child, but under that of bread, would one day become the food of our souls ? would he not have envied us ? Whilst he only received in his arms the Infant Jesus, the Christian receives into his soul his Saviour, who has lived, died, and risen again for him, and he possesses the fulness of that of which Simeon had but the beginning. Let us therefore repeat this song of thanksgiving each time

that Jesus thus comes down into our souls. Let us join our hands upon our breasts, and bless God, for our Saviour is in us, as truly as in His tabernacle, as truly as in the arms of His Mother or of holy Simeon. And though we do not see Him, though our faith must supply the weakness of our senses, a day will come in which we shall see Him, if we are worthy, in a happy eternity, in which our eyes will be enlightened, not dazzled, by His glory. Let us accept death beforehand, for it will open heaven to us.

What a hope is this! To leave the earth with Jesus in our hearts, that we may go to see Jesus! May a holy life give us the certainty of such a future, and with what joy could we then repeat, after holy Simeon, "Now, O my God, lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace."

Let us, with Joseph and Mary, admire all the great things which have been said of our Saviour. This canticle is the third which we find in the Gospel. The *Magnificat*, which the Blessed Virgin, in the height of her joy and gratitude, poured forth to God, announces the mercies of God towards His people, and the deliver-

ance of the oppressed. The *Benedictus*, spoken by Zacharias when God gave him back the power of speech after the birth of his son, shews us the mission of St. John the Baptist, and the rising of the Sun of Justice. And lastly, holy Simeon's canticle, which we may recognize by the first words, *Nunc dimittis*, while repeating the solemn testimony which the other two bear to the coming and to the Divinity of our Saviour, adds one other feature, by speaking for the first time of that light which was to extend its rays beyond Israel, to enlighten the whole world. We are among those Gentiles, to whom Jesus brought the light. When holy Simeon saw in spirit the light which was to enlighten distant nations, our ancestors were worshipping a branch of mistletoe and sacrificing human victims on those stones which we still sometimes find in the depths of our woods. Let us also sing our deliverance; and when the Church, who so well knows how to appropriate prayer to all hours of the day as well as to each moment of life, ends the last office of the day by the canticle *Nunc dimittis*, let us reverently stand and sing it,

thanking God, who gives us every day the privilege of His presence, and after having consoled His servants by such great graces during their lifetime, makes death easy to them by such hopes.

Prayer.

Holy Mary, Mother of God and our Mother, and thou, St. Joseph, whom the Son of God deigned to call father, with what faith and wonder did you listen to these great things, which were spoken of Him! May we obtain through prayer something of this faith. May this canticle of holy Simeon penetrate our souls, and may we also recognize Jesus, every time we go to kneel in the sanctuaries in which He deigns daily to dwell. And when this Faith shall have increased in our souls, when we, more happy than Simeon, shall have received over and over again, and shall have kept in our hearts, the Word made Flesh, Whom he only received in his arms, and when, strengthened by His adorable Body and Blood, we shall be prepared for the awful journey, pray then to our God that He may let His

servants depart in peace, that every veil may be withdrawn, and that we may at last see in all its splendour the Light which has enlightened all nations, the Glory of the elect in the heavenly Jerusalem. St. Joseph, patron of a happy death, remember us then. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Practice.

Remember, on entering a church, that God is there living and present. Excite in our souls the joy and reverence of holy Simeon.

FOURTEENTH DAY.

THE PRESENTATION—(*continuation*).

Yesterday we meditated together on the song of thanksgiving of the holy and aged Simeon ; we compared it to the two first canticles which we find in the Gospel in praise of our Saviour. To-day a sound of mourning will mingle with our accents of joy, and for the first time since the Desire of all nations has been given to the earth, sad and prophetic words will remind us that the Son of the Most High, whose coming the angels have so joyously announced, is at the same time the Man of Sorrows, over whom the prophets have wept. The Prophet Isaias had said : “ Despised, and the most abject of men, a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity ; and His look was it were hidden and despised, whereupon we esteemed Him not. Surely He hath borne our infirmities, and carried our sorrows ; and we have thought Him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and

afflicted. But He was wounded for our iniquities; He was bruised for our sins: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, every one hath turned aside into his own way, and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was offered because it was His own will, and He opened not His mouth: He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearers, and He shall not open His mouth.....He was reputed with the wicked; and He hath borne the sins of many, and hath prayed for the transgressors.”*

Thus, in order to recognise in the Gospel the Saviour of the world, these are the signs we should seek; the Man of Sorrows, rejected by those He has come to save, an object of hate to the wicked. Up to this time we have heard only songs of joy. The Angel hails Mary as blessed amongst all women; Elizabeth proclaims her Mother of her God. Mary herself in her canticle speaks only of the triumph

* Isa. liii.

of God and of the deliverance of Israel. Holy Zacharias recognises the Sun of Justice which rises in the highest heavens, the Angels announce to the shepherds the good tidings of great joy, and the shepherds believe and worship; the star appears, and the magi in their turn come to worship. Simeon blesses God for having shewn him the salvation of Israel. The stable of Bethlehem and the hard hearts which refuse a shelter for the birth of their Saviour, alone remind us that all arms and hearts will not be open to receive Him. But this was not enough: hear how the Gospel goes on. Mary and Joseph are kneeling in the Temple, and Simeon holds in his arms the Infant Jesus. "And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His Mother: Behold this Child is set up for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted: and thine own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed." He is come to be a sign which shall be contradicted; to be an example of purity and spotless virtue, against which the impurity of the world will rise;

to be the voice of infallible truth, the voice of God announcing a more perfect law, against which the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the doctors will rebel; to be the defender of the lowly and the poor, the comforter of the afflicted, against whom oppressors of every class and sort will take arms. Behold the Man of Sorrows; behold Him who will be esteemed as a leper, and wounded for our iniquities; behold Him who comes for the fall or the resurrection of many in Israel, for to the sins of the wicked, ingratitude and impenitence will be added, and the ill for which they refuse to receive a cure will become to them the cause of their eternal death. "Wo to their souls," says the prophet, "for evils are rendered to them. Say to the just man that it is well, for he shall eat the fruit of his doings. Wo to the wicked unto evil, for the reward of his hands shall be given him."* Yes, this Child whom the aged Simeon blesses, and whom he worships, before giving Him back to His Mother, is He who is about to change the face of the earth.

* Isa. iii. 9-11.

There is no one, from the king on his throne even to the most heartlessly neglected of the poor, whose existence and eternal destiny the coming of this Child does not change. This Light of Israel, which God reveals to the eyes of holy Simeon, is soon about to be shed over all the earth. It will enlighten all things; it will penetrate even into those depths in which falsehood and human pride are hidden. It will make what is good shine out in all its beauty, and it will light up evil in all its deformity. After His coming uncertainty as to good and evil can exist no longer. Man will choose freely, and henceforth sin will no more have the excuse of ignorance. Happy they who fixing their eyes on this divine light, will take it as the guide of all their steps, and will direct them towards it with all their strength, despising the false lights of the earth, which dazzle and pass away like those *ignis fatuus* lights which we see wandering about on summer nights, and suddenly disappearing in darkness. Happy those who, hailing Jesus in His cradle with good will, as did the shepherds of Bethlehem and the magian kings, will

walk courageously in His train, blessing and imitating Him every day of their lives, to the best of their feeble powers, worshipping Him in the sorrowful memorials of His Passion and Death, and drinking in peace and resignation their chalice, so little bitter in comparison with His. Blessed are they, for the Infant Jesus is born to be their hope in this world, and their eternal resurrection in the next. But unhappy, on the contrary, are those who, turning away from the Eternal Light, plunge themselves voluntarily into night, and in their wandering mistake false *ignis fatuus* lights for the bright beams of day. Unhappy those who, despising the Infant Jesus in His crib, follow Him not in His life nor in His death, for there will be neither excuse nor pardon for them, if they persist in their blindness and impenitence: the Infant Jesus is not come for their resurrection but for their fall. Alas! the number will be but too great, of these ungrateful men, who will find death where they should have found life. The eternal sign of salvation, the word of God, the mark which Jesus our Saviour places by baptism on

the brow of every Christian, Jesus Himself, His holy Church and her divine teaching, will be the sign to be contradicted, will be the object of calumnies and blasphemies, and of the attacks of the wicked.

Do we not see it ourselves? Is it not as true now as in the days of holy Simeon? We know that there are some unhappy men, to whom the unparalleled grace of baptism, and the blessing of having known and loved God in their childhood, become a fearful responsibility, and the cause of an overpowering accusation before God, who will require of us an account of all the graces He has given us. Little is asked of him to whom little has been given. The offence of a stranger is nothing compared with the offence of a son. How much might not a God exact from us, who, from being our sovereign master made Himself our friend; a God who died for us on the cross! If His mercy did not always exceed His justice, even the shadow of a fault committed by us against Him would be a crime: though we consecrate to Him all the powers of our mind and heart, and every moment of

our existence, it does not really cover our debt. Think, then, how immense is this debt. By giving Him our whole being, poor miserable creatures that we are, we do not pay the thousandth part of it. What would our life given up for God be worth compared with the life of an Incarnate God sacrificed for us? Besides, this debt of gratitude contracted centuries ago by our fathers is accumulated and multiplied before it reaches us; they were Christians, ransomed like us at the price of the blood of Jesus Christ, and if it be thought just in human affairs that the son should be responsible for the father's debt, is it not just that the debt of gratitude contracted towards God by our fathers, should pass on to us? Think you that God asks as much from the poor savage, who, in the depths of his forests, has never received the teachings of truth, and who worships with his imperfect mind the Great Spirit whom he knows not, as from us, who have been laden with the blessings of God from our cradle, washed in baptism from the stain of original sin, rocked in the arms of a Christian mother, who taught us to know and to

love God? The more immense the blessing, the more sinful would be our ingratitude, if we failed to profit by it. It is because Jesus is born to be our hope and our resurrection, if we are brave and faithful Christians, that He will be our fall and our condemnation, if we present ourselves before Him in the day of judgment with the sign of a Christian on our brow, and in our heart the shame of a guilty life, a hundred times worse than that of a pagan. A pagan has not received the numberless graces which we have abused, and will not, like us, have to render an account of them. Hear what the Holy Scripture tells us of the chastisement reserved for the ungrateful: "My beloved had a vineyard on a hill in a fruitful place. And He fenced it in, and picked the stones out of it, and planted it with choicest vines, and built a tower in the midst thereof, and set up a wine press therein. And He looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and ye men of Juda, judge between Me and My vineyard. What is there that I ought to do more to My vine-

yard that I have not done to it? Was it that I looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it hath brought forth wild grapes? And now I will shew you what I will do to My vineyard. I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be wasted; I will break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down. And I will make it desolate; it shall not be pruned, and it shall not be digged; but briars and thorns shall come up: and I will command the clouds to rain no rain upon it.”*

This vineyard of the Lord is our soul! Our soul which He has placed in a Christian country and family, from which He in our youth, by the holy teaching of the Church, has withdrawn all doubts and all the errors of ignorance, just as the householder picked the stones out of his vineyard. Our soul, in which, since then, He has implanted so many good desires, so many holy resolutions, like those choice vines, planted by the hand of the Master of the vineyard. Our soul, in which, in those blessed days of childhood and of

* Isaias v.

first communion, He raised as it were a tower of Faith, gratitude, and courage, in which our firm will was to endeavour to render to the Householder the fruit of so much pains and trouble.

Let us pray to God that not one of our souls may be compared to this ungrateful vineyard, which, as the return of so much labour, gave only wild and bitter fruits. Let us think of the terrible chastisement inflicted upon it by Him who had cultivated it with so much tenderness; then let us cast a salutary glance upon ourselves; let us remember that Jesus, our Saviour and our hope, will one day be our Judge, and that the Fatherly Hand so ready to bless us, may through our fault become the avenging hand which will chastise us for all eternity.

Let us humble ourselves before God, and let us promise to labour with courage and perseverance in this vineyard of our soul, which He has so much loved; then, after having called on His mercy to compensate for the weakness of our efforts, let us unite our voices with confidence to that of the holy Simeon, to hail the Infant Jesus, the Infant Saviour, and His holy

Mother ; let us hail Mary, and mingle gratitude and sympathy with our reverence, for now for the first time Mary suffers to obtain for us salvation and life. Holy Simeon said : " And thine own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed, that a ray of light and justice may come in which the just will gather the fruit of their labour, in which the wicked will see the recesses of their evil conscience made manifest in the broad daylight. Let us rejoice in this expectation, we who can with humble hope call ourselves men of good will. Let us call to our aid her whose mercy will but plead for our weakness, her whose voice has the most right to make itself heard. Henceforth she participates in the work of our redemption, no longer by her acceptance of the Divine Maternity alone, but by that grief which beforehand pierces her soul like a sword : for according to a pious belief, immediately after the words of holy Simeon, a veil was lifted, as it were, from Mary's eyes : she saw open before her the long perspective of her Son's sorrows, weariness, and suffering ; a sorrowful per-

spective, ending at Calvary and on the Cross. Henceforth no happiness without tears; worthy Mother of the Man of Sorrows, she will be called the Mother of Sorrows. Henceforth, when her Infant smiles upon her, when He grows under her eyes in grace and beauty, the hidden wound will bleed, and she will long to recal the hours and to lengthen the days which bring her beloved Son nearer to the agony of Calvary. Mothers should understand the sorrows of Mary, and love her much, for she has suffered much for us.

Kneeling in the court of the temple, she heard the last words of holy Simeon, and the first drops of the bitter chalice fell on her heart. In the meantime, a voice sounds again on her ear, a friendly voice, which she had doubtless more than once heard in her childhood, and which thrilled through her as it joyously blessed the Saviour. "And there was," says the Gospel, "one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser; she was far advanced in years, and had lived with her husband seven years from her virginity. And she was a widow until

fourscore and four years, who departed not from the temple, by fastings and prayers, serving night and day. Now she at the same hour coming in, confessed to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all that looked for the redemption of Israel."

Let us leave this scene of joy and sorrow with our hearts filled with gratitude. Not without cause does the Church celebrate this day as one of the most beautiful feasts of the Blessed Virgin. It is the day on which begins her share in the work of our redemption, on which, for the love of us poor sinners, she accepts the sorrows from which our salvation will come.

In past times our fathers flocked in crowds to Mary's sanctuaries, and thousands of lights burning either on the altars, or in the hands of the faithful, recalled the coming of that Light of Israel, so impatiently awaited, and hailed with so much joy by Simeon and by Anna the prophetess, this feast loved by all faithful hearts, and placed as a benediction at the beginning of the year, we still know and love, and still call it by

its ancient name of *Candlemas-day*. We come, as in former days, bearing in our hands the candle of yellow wax, the produce of our bees, and on that day the housewife is up before dawn, to deck her garden hives in holyday attire, and to awaken them according to the old custom.

“ Now awaken little bee,
Labour well for God and me.”

We must be careful not to attach a superstitious meaning to these old customs, but preserve them as consecrating to God the objects and the instruments of our labour, and in remembrance of the Faith of our Fathers.*

Prayer.

Mary, mother of sorrow and of hope, teach us the divine secret of thy joys and thy sorrows; show us that in thy life they join and mingle with one another like the links of a mysterious chain. Teach us that from sorrows well borne spring lasting joys, whilst from passing

* I give this passage as it stands in the French. It illustrates an ancient Catholic custom, still remaining in France.—*Translator.*

joys too eagerly sought after spring lasting sorrows. O Blessed Virgin Mary, obtain by thy prayers that thy Divine Son may have come for our eternal salvation, and not for our fall. Obtain that nothing in our life may contradict Jesus the Eternal Word, in whom we desire to believe, or the cross with which our brow was signed in baptism, and with which, by His grace, it will again be signed in the hour of death. "O thou who art at once the Mother of God and the mother of the sinner, the mother of the Judge and the mother of the exile: since thou art the mother of these two sons, permit not thy guilty child to be condemned by thy Child, who is God."* Amen.

Resolution.

To accept all suffering for the love of God, and after the example of Mary, who accepted all her sufferings for us.

* Prayer of St. Ignatius.

FIFTEENTH DAY.

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.

The holy Gospel tells us that after Joseph and Mary "had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their city Nazareth."* Mary entered once more the dwelling in which she had so often prayed and hoped, and which, in the strength of Faith and obedience, she had left for the fatigues of a journey to Bethlehem. What recollections crowded upon her as she crossed the threshold. What joys and what sorrows did she bring back with the Divine Son whom she pressed upon her heart, and whose bitter passion she foresaw! While reposing in the silence of Nazareth, she must have hoped that this sanctuary of her prayers might shelter in peace at least the Childhood of Jesus. But there was no secure resting-place for Him on the earth He had come to save. Even the humble roof of Naza-

* St. Luke ii. 39.

reth was denied to the Master of the world.

When the magi, guided by the mysterious star, reached Jerusalem, they asked the astonished inhabitants of this capital of Judea, where was the King of the Jews: "for we have seen His star in the East, and are come to adore Him. And King Herod, hearing this, was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And assembling together all the chief priests, and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where Christ should be born. But they said to him, In Bethlehem of Juda.Then Herod, privately calling the wise men, learned diligently of them the time of the star which appeared to them, and sending them into Bethlehem, said, Go, and diligently inquire after the Child, and when you have found Him, bring me word again, that I also may come and adore Him."

Now Herod was not one of those pure hearts who, receiving the good news with joy, had hastened to worship the Saviour. He was a man of a corrupt and cruel heart, who governed the Jews by the authority of the Roman emperor, a

governor hated by all, and made suspicious by this well-deserved hatred. When he heard that these foreign princes had crossed mountains and deserts to come and worship a new King of the Jews, he trembled on his insecure throne. The prophecies which promised to the people of Israel a King and a Saviour, who should put an end to all their troubles, were known to him also; and the remembrance of this promise, and the continual thought of the miracles which confirmed it, haunted him in the midst of his power. It is in vain that the wicked man denies God, and shuts his ears to His word. He may often appear quiet and happy in his disobedience; he may appear to succeed in all his undertakings, and ignorant people are tempted to doubt the justice of God when they see him happy whilst the good so often suffer. But this justice of God, which they presume to doubt, is felt by the wicked man himself, in the depths of his conscience. We imagine that he is happy: if we consider him attentively, his laugh sounds hollow, his restless glance seems to be seeking in each face the scorn which he knows he

deserves ; if he forgets himself an instant, a sudden sharp pain strikes his heart, and brings him back to the sad truth ; for it is no light thing to live in the hatred of God and of men. Human happiness is only lasting and true when it is the earthly reward of a good life. God gives it to His servants when it pleases Him, and when He knows that they are strong enough to continue faithful to Him in prosperity ; it is the earnest of happiness in heaven, the first payment given to the labourer, which was called in old English, *God's penny*.* “ Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God, and His justice, and all these things shall be added to you.”† True happiness, even in this world, is found in these words of our Saviour. But never let us call that man happy who has sought after earthly happiness before that of heaven. Let us call him unhappy who has sacrificed eternity to time. If all the prosperity of earth should follow him as far as the grave, it will go no farther ; he feels and knows

* See Percy's Relics of Ancient Poetry. The phrase is still used in France.

† St. Matt. vi. 33.

this ; and this certainty, which he cannot get rid of, gnaws at his heart, like those invisible worms, which destroy the interior, leaving the surface untouched. He feels every moment that all that he has so much wished for, and which he thought to gain by a number of guilty actions, is trembling and giving way under him. He has sought for help on earth alone, and what he has gained through so much watching, trouble, and remorse, gives way beneath him like a staff breaking under the weight of a sick man, and he feels the abyss under his feet. In the midst of such tortures he puts on an outward appearance of merriment, and is an object of envy to the foolish. Not all the tears of the righteous are so bitter as one of these false joys of the wicked ; for these blessed tears bring with them heavenly hopes, and whilst our poor human nature is suffering and weeping, our souls see before them the speedy end of their exile, and their eternal reward in God. The just man knows in the midst of his sorrows that a passing suffering will bring him endless happiness. On the other hand, when the wicked man feels earthly happi-

ness slipping from his hands, he attaches himself to it with desperation ; the enjoyment has been so short, and the labour to obtain it so long, and after this brief enjoyment, mingled with disappointments and remorse, he knows that he has nothing to hope, and all to fear.

This is what Herod felt when public rumour announced to him the arrival of these foreign princes come to worship the King of the Jews. Who was this Child, born at Bethlehem, in that very city of David from which the Jews expected their Saviour ? Could He be a descendant of the last Kings of Israel, escaped by some miracle from his hatred ? Was some terrible rebellion about to burst out against him, and would the Jews, trembling under the yoke rise at the first call of that Christ so long expected ? “ No,” said the tyrant to himself, “ this dangerous child must not live : the hope of Israel must be stifled in the cradle.”

But how to find Him ? By what signs was He to be recognised ? Who could help him in this search, if not these strangers, who had been brought from their distant country by a mysterious instinct ?

Herod, therefore, hid his criminal designs, and spoke to the magi with assumed gentleness. "And when you have found Him, bring me word again, that I also may come and adore Him."

But God was on the watch, and His wisdom laughs to scorn the vain calculations of the wicked. Warned in a dream, the magi left Bethlehem without passing through Jerusalem, and returned to their country by another road.

All this time the Infant Jesus and His Mother were in the grotto at Nazareth, hidden by their poverty. An Angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in his sleep, saying: "Arise, and take the Child and His Mother, and fly into Egypt: and be there until I shall tell thee; for it will come to pass that Herod will seek the Child to destroy Him."*

At these words the aged saint arose, his heart full of sadness, but firmly trusting in God. He called Mary. The gentle virgin, as calm in grief as she had been humble in joy, raised her eyes towards heaven to ask for courage, and put in

* St. Matt. ii. 13.

order her poor house, which she so much loved, and which she was forced to abandon. Leaning over the cradle of her Son, she contemplated His sleep, and said: "Beloved Child, given for the salvation of the world, already are persecutions beginning against Thee. This is the first wound of the sword of sorrow." Joseph led before the door the humble beast which was to bear Jesus and His Mother. They must start. Farewell once more, poor grotto of Nazareth, peaceful dwelling, sanctuary in which God heard the prayers of His handmaid, hearth at which the Master of the world was sheltered. Take courage, Blessed Mother, take thy sleeping Son from His cradle, wrap Him in thy veil, and warm Him against thy heart, for the night is cold, and the Infant God has no refuge but His Mother's arms. The young of the turtle dove have a nest in which their mother can keep them warm under her wings. Mary's Child has no longer where to lay His Head!

The door was shut behind the exiles. The patient ass bore the Blessed Virgin, with her Divine Son in her arms; Joseph

guided the gentle animal by the bridle, and supported himself with his staff. The night covered their departure. They set out, and Joseph and Mary gave one last look through the darkness at their poor dwelling, which they feared never to see again. The first rays of the morning found them already far on on the road to the desert.

Pious legends have been attached by our forefathers to the places visited by the fugitives in this toilsome journey. The Christians who, seven hundred years ago, went with so lively a Faith to deliver Jerusalem and the tomb of our Saviour from the hands of the infidels, sought with filial care the traces of their passage, of which the tradition is preserved by the shepherds of the east. The ruins of ancient sanctuaries, raised formerly by the Christians who had remained in Palestine, pointed out these sacred places to the Catholic soldiers who were brought by war to these same shores seventy years ago. The pilgrims of our own time find them still. One of the first of these legends is that of the penitent thief. It tells us that the holy travellers, after

having crossed the mountainous country of Galilee, often hiding in caverns, and following the course of the torrents, directed their steps towards Racula, to descend into the plains of Syria. It was night-fall, and Mary was pressing to her breast the sleeping Infant Jesus, when a band of robbers came to attack them. However, at the sight of this poor and aged man, and of this young and trembling Mother, the chief of the robbers stopped. Some ray of mercy from the Heart of Jesus touched his guilty heart. He signed to his companions to withdraw, and approaching the travellers with reverence, conducted them to his abode, a kind of fortress, the ruins of which are shewn to this day by the Arab shepherds. Thirty-three years later, this same criminal, crucified by the side of the Saviour of the world, silenced the gross imprecations of the companion of his crimes and of his punishment, and turning his head towards the dying Saviour, he said to Him : " Lord, remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom. And Jesus said to him : Amen, I say to thee, this day

thou shalt be with Me in paradise.”* The grace of repentance is sometimes the reward of a good action. Let us, therefore, never despise a sinner, for he may one day be above us, near Jesus in paradise.

At one day's journey from this shelter of the thieves, which still bears the name of *Latroun*, (from the ancient name for thief,) the ruins of an ancient sanctuary mark the place where, according to tradition, the travellers rested, Mary and Joseph quenched their thirst, and the Infant Jesus slept under the shade of palm trees and sycamores. It was one of those isles of verdure in the midst of the sandy desert, in which Providence has caused a fountain to spring up, and which the Arabs call an oasis. After resting here a short time, the fugitives continued their journey in anxiety and fear. They drew near to Bethlehem, and though not yet knowing the cruel orders of Herod, they knew that the life of the Divine Child was threatened by them. Seeking lonely paths, and hiding under the shades

* St. Luke xxiii. 43-44.

of night, they revisited the abandoned stable; they saw once more the birth-place of Jesus. Near the Grotto of the Nativity, in a still darker hollow, the ancient Christians have raised an altar. It was there, according to their pious belief, that the Blessed Virgin Mary stopped to suckle the Infant Jesus; and in this poor shelter, known under the name of the *Grotto of Milk*, the Arab mothers bring their new-born babes, to ask of Mary health for them and for themselves.

Leaving Bethlehem, the holy travellers entered that barren desert in which the people of God had wandered for forty years, before entering into the promised land. As they drew nearer to Egypt the climate became hotter, and it took the fugitives a long time to take this journey of near four hundred miles. How many times must Joseph and Mary have suffered from thirst! How many times did the Infant Jesus weep from weariness! The following is one of the most beautiful of the legends brought over the seas by one of the ancient French Christians. "When our Lady, Mother of God, had

passed the deserts, and had come to the before-mentioned place, she laid our Lord on the ground, and went to look for some water in the neighbourhood, but she could find none. She returned very sorrowful to her beloved Child, who lay stretched on the sand. When He saw her grief, the Divine Infant struck the ground with His tiny foot, and immediately there sprang up a fountain of clear sweet water. Our Lady, full of joy, gave thanks to God, and once more laying down her Child, she washed His clothes in the water of this fountain, and laid them out on the ground to dry. And from the water which dropped from the linen as it dried sprang up little shrubs of healing balsam.”*

At last the ancient land of Egypt appeared before their eyes. The exiles entered that land in which the children of Israel had suffered so much, and from which the miracles of God's hand had delivered them, and into which the Son of this all-powerful God was now coming as a fugitive. All the idols were still

* Le Seigneur d'Enghere, cité par l'Abbe Orsini, dans sa Vie de la Sainte Vierge.

standing in this ancient country of pagan science. But when the travellers entered the great city of Heliopolis, and the Infant Jesus passed before their temples, the altars, it is said, trembled to their base, and the statues of the false gods were thrown down and broken into a thousand pieces. Little thought the passers-by as they saw Joseph, bent by the fatigues of the journey, the humble Mary, and the sweet face of the Babe, who lay smiling in her arms, that one of these poor strangers was He whose very approach made the devils tremble in their sanctuaries, and broke their images at the feet of their worshippers.

Tradition tells us that the Holy Family passed seven years in a village near Heliopolis, now called Matarich. There again the piety of ancient pilgrims have connected the name of Mary with the only fountain of sweet water which is found in this part of Egypt; as if Jesus, the source of life, and Mary, whom the Scriptures call the Fountain of Salvation, were to leave, even on earth, living waters to quench the thirst of all future generations. It was there, they say, that Mary

bathed the Infant Jesus, and washed their poor garments. The Mussulmans shewed to the French soldiers, during the wars in Egypt, an old sycamore which they called the tree of Jesus and Mary; it is said to have sent out a new shoot from the trunk on which Mary came in the evening to rest with her Child in her arms; and after the battle of Heliopolis, the brave General Kleber ventured to write his victorious name on the bark of the venerable tree.

“How and on what,” asks St. Bonaventura, “were Jesus, Mary, and Joseph sustained during so long a stay? Were they forced to beg for food? It is recorded that Mary provided for her wants and those of her Son by her distaff and needle. The Queen of the world spun and worked with the needle through love of poverty. Poverty was always very dear to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, and even till death were they faithful to it.”

Let us now leave them in this foreign land, watching over the precious trust which God had confided to them, and supporting Him by their labours. If they suffered all the privations of exile, labour,

and poverty, they were still happy. Jesus is with them, and the peace of heaven reigns in their hearts, with resignation and hope. The misery is all on the side of the triumphant and impious Herod, who was pursued by remorse in the midst of his guilty prosperity. It is painful to leave this spectacle of holy suffering, to return to the crimes of the wicked man, to what he suffered without consolation, and to his death of despair.

Prayer.

O holy Virgin Mary, so patient and courageous, when the persecution of the wicked obliged thee to leave thy dwelling, and the land of thy fathers, obtain for me the grace to leave all, like thee, for the love of Jesus. Make me understand that with Jesus, poverty and want itself is salutary and sweet, and that without Him, what appears to be happiness, is suffering and affliction. May I never hesitate to make a sacrifice which is required by duty. O dear Mother, the great grace of living with Jesus is often a cause of persecution in this world.

“Wherever Jesus enters, there enters with Him His crosses, and all the contradictions which ever accompany Him.”*

Remain, Lord Jesus, remain in my soul, with Thy blessed cross, our salvation and our hope. And thou, holy Mother, shew me everything that can separate me from Him, that I may renounce it without hesitation, resigning myself beforehand to lose all rather than the presence of my Saviour.

Practice.

To look upon nothing as a misfortune except that which separates us from God.

* Bossuet, Elevations sur les Mysteres.

SIXTEENTH DAY.

MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS.

“A voice was heard in Rama, Rachel bewailing her children.”

“Then Herod,” says the holy Gospel, “perceiving that he was deluded by the wise men, was exceeding angry; and sending, killed all the men-children that were in Bethlehem, and in the borders thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time, which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.”* What mourning and what terror in all families! Who can describe the despair of the mothers, and their heart-rending lamentations, rising up towards heaven, with the last cries of the children slain in their arms? “Then,” says the Gospel, “was accomplished that which the Prophet Jeremias had announced in these words: A voice was heard in Rama, lamentation and great mourning; Rachel bewailing

* St. Matt. ii. 16.

her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not." The wicked Herod had filled up the measure of his crimes ; he was become the first persecutor of Jesus Christ on earth, the murderer of those innocent victims who began the suffering history of the martyrs. Woe to that hardened sinner, that murderer, against whom cries the blood of children, and the bitter lamentations of their mothers ! The justice of God is approaching, that justice which falls and strikes like a thunderbolt, when the criminal has let the hour of mercy pass by. But happy those pure victims, the first to fall for Jesus Christ, in the days of childhood, unstained as yet by sin ! Happy the innocents who died in Judea, for the sake of the Infant Jesus, first martyrs of the new law, whose pure voices joined in the praises sung by the just of the old law, when the risen and triumphant Saviour opened to them the gates of heaven ! "Hail !" says the Church, in one of her touching hymns, as each year brings back the feast of the Holy Innocents, "Hail ! ye flowers of martyrs, whom the persecutor of Jesus destroyed on the very thresh-

hold of life, as the stormy wind destroys the budding roses ! First victims of Jesus Christ, tender troop of sacrificed lambs ; even at the foot of the altar you take in your innocent hands not the toys of earth, but palms and immortal crowns.”* And further on the antiphon repeats : “Innocent babes were slain for Christ, sucklings were killed by a wicked king. Now they follow the Lamb without spot, and cry without ceasing, Glory be to Thee, O Lord.”

Nothing is more touching than the reverence shown by the Church for these little children slain for the Infant Jesus, for these May roses, scattered by the stormy wind, and borne far from earth, where everything fades, to heaven, where their perfume will last for ever. Does it not seem that God, who multiplies for us the teachings of this holy history, has been pleased, by the touching Gospel narrative, and the homage of the Church, to bring to our minds, together with the thought of the Holy Innocents, the remembrance, at once sad and comforting, of little chil-

* Hymn for the Feast of Holy Innocents, “*Salvete flores martyrum.*”

dren who are dead? Amongst the families to whom God has given the blessing and charge of bringing up several children for Him, there are very few who have not seen one beloved little being taken away in the first fair days of innocence, to go up to heaven as pure as he came from the saving waters of Baptism, and bathed in the tears of his parents. That day is a day of mourning for the family; the silent children look with great tearful eyes at the empty cradle of the little one, whose smile they had so much loved to see. The father, with his head bent down, thinks also of his angel, who is flown away; and he has less heart for work, because he has one less loved one to support. And the mother! Alas, the poor mother! her heart bleeds, and she weeps, as the mothers of Israel wept, and will not be comforted, because her beloved child is no more. There is not one of us who has not experienced this grief, when God has taken a child from us. Those do not weep less, who with difficulty gain bread for their family, in the sweat of their brow. Let us then be

sure that our Father who is in heaven ever sends hope to soften affliction.

Do we sufficiently consider that this child, for whom we weep, is become one of God's angels? Do we consider that this little creature we have rocked in our arms, rejoices in the sight of God, and that, saved by His mercy from the sorrows and temptations of life, it for ever sings His praises with its innocent voice, and can pray for those who are left weeping for its loss? Its place amongst us long remains empty; then, little by little, come new occupations; the other children grow up, their new wants, different events, the consolations and sufferings of our own and our children's life, by slow degrees dim the lively picture of the little angel who prays on high. But would it not be a holy and blessed thought to make the happy child whom God has called back to His own bosom, the guardian of those left on earth, the friend of the family, its intercessor with God, the confidant and depository of our hopes? Oh what sweetness would this holy practice one day bring to the torn heart of the mother! what balm for her wound! It was God's will

that the holy innocents should be the first of the martyrs, the first saints of the new law, the first intercessors for the great Christian family. Why should not each family afflicted by the death of a child, offer it to God as the first-fruits of the flock, as a first saint, whose innocent prayer would render the way to heaven easier for the rest of the family ?

To obtain that unspeakable consolation which Christian parents feel in the certainty that their children are angels in heaven, we all know that Baptism is absolutely necessary. If they had not received that great sacrament, by which they are made children of God, they would not enjoy the happiness of heaven. Let us, then, never put off the baptism of our children. Let us procure for them without delay the blessing of so essential a sacrament. Let us not expose them to the danger of being surprised by death without having received holy baptism. Life at that age is frail; and in case of necessity and danger of death, let us remember that any one is permitted to administer baptism. In order to baptize it is only necessary to pour

common water on the head of the child, so that the water flows upon the skin, and to pronounce at the same moment these words: "I baptize thee, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." having the intention to do in that what the Church does. It is necessary that the water should be poured by the same person who pronounces at the same time the holy words of baptism.

Let us now return to Herod. What became of that cruel tyrant, whilst the lamentations of the Jewish mothers were rising up to God from Rama? If we believe the account of a pagan author,* his own son, together with the other innocents of Bethlehem, was murdered in his nurse's arms. With unspeakable horror the impious king saw his past crimes rise before him. The innocent blood of his wife and his three sons, whom he had sacrificed to unjust suspicions, and of all those in Israel who had dared to resist his innovations upon the law, cried out against him at all hours. But true re-

* Macrobius, quoted by Bossuet, *Elevations sur les Mysteres*.

pentance could not touch his soul, and his remorse ended only in fury. Hated by his family, he threw his eldest son into prison, on suspicion of having attempted to take his father's miserable life. At the same time a horrible disease seized on him. He was devoured by burning ulcers; and, as if he were dead, worms already gnawed his living corpse. His fury redoubled as he approached his death, which all Israel was awaiting as a deliverance. He caused those who ventured to believe a report of his death to be burnt alive; and in order that tears might at least accompany his funeral, he caused the most eminent men of Judea to be collected in the circus, with orders to put them to death as soon as his eyes were closed.* Five days after having witnessed the death of the son who should have been his heir, devoured by suffering, terror, and despair, he attempted to kill himself, and at length expired, a horror to God, to men, and to himself. Who would dare to say that such a death was the end of his sufferings?

* History of the New Testament, by M. Vallon.

Let us turn away our eyes from this horrible picture. The death of the sinner is the most hideous of sights. Let us, however, consider that this life, the end of which I have just described to you, was surrounded by the most constant and extraordinary earthly success; that all the revolutions that at that time shook the great Roman Empire left Herod standing, powerful and feared; and lastly, that this man, whom no one resisted with impunity, was miserable throughout his life, as at his last hour, and that his deserved sufferings gained for him but a death of despair. Let us remember this, and let us bless the salutary adversities, the hardships, and the contradictions, in the midst of which we preserve a good conscience, and gain the hope of a peaceful death in the bosom of God.

Let us often think of that hour which will be the consequence and the summing up of our whole lives: holy and sweet if we have been faithful to the first promises of our baptism; fearful if we have the misery of being unrepentant sinners.

Prayer.

Holy Virgin Mary, thou whose powerful intercession in the hour of death the Church teaches us daily to ask, obtain for us the constant thought of that hour, to guide, enlighten, and console us here below, in order that death may be to us the beginning of true life. Obtain for us grace to live as we one day hope to die. Death has no terror, except through sin. Make us fly from sin, and love the thought of death ; refresh our souls often with the remembrance of the holy innocents, who sing at the foot of thy throne, of the young souls of children whom God in His mercy still calls to give them the palm without the combat. "Of such," saith our Saviour, "is the kingdom of heaven." May repentance with us take the place of innocence, and may our happy children, members of God's triumphant Church, sing at the hour of our death the canticles of joy which the Church sung while we were weeping for them here below. Amen.

Practice.

To be constantly thinking how to live well, in order to die well.

SEVENTEENTH DAY.

LIFE AT NAZARETH—FAMILY LIFE.

The Child Jesus lived for several years in the distant land of Egypt, watched over by the tenderness of His Mother, and supported by the labour of him He called His father. One night, while Joseph was sleeping after a toilsome day, an angel from heaven entered his dwelling, and the brightness of his countenance shone on the venerable head of the sleeping patriarch. "Arise," he said to him, "and take the Child and His Mother, and go into the land of Israel. For those are dead that sought the life of the Child."* St. Joseph recognised the voice of the messenger from heaven, who twice before had visited him in his sleep. He called Mary, blessing God for having put an end to this bitter trial of exile. The preparations for the journey were soon made, and the Blessed Virgin, taking the Child Jesus

* St. Matt. ii. 20.

by the hand, gave a last look at that foreign dwelling in which the serenity of her soul had shed around her peace and calmness during so many years of sorrow. Then, with tearful eyes, the holy travellers turned their steps towards their native land. God preserved them from all dangers, and supported them in the fatigues of the journey. They had with them the angels of whom God spoke by the mouth of His prophet: "For He hath given His angels charge over Thee, to keep Thee in all Thy ways. In their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest Thou dash Thy foot against a stone."*

The invisible angels accompanied them across the desert, worshipping with deep adoration the voluntary fatigues of the Infant God, supporting the steps of St. Joseph, and venerating her who was to bear the title of Queen of Angels. What is that mysterious strength which preserves happiness in the midst of fatigue, and serenity in suffering? It is Faith in the word of God, obedience to His will, resignation, which makes us willingly

* Ps. xc. 11-12.

accept suffering for God's sake; hope, which shews us the eternal reward of our toils in a better world, and above all, the love of Jesus. This it was which supported Mary and Joseph under the fatigues of their long journey. If we knew how to hope like Mary, and to obey, and to resign ourselves as she did, God would send us also His invisible angels to support our steps even in the roughest paths.

At the end of their journey the Holy Family reached the high lands of Judea, and Joseph and Mary wished to enter the ancient City of David, to return thanks to God in His temple. But Archelaus, son of the impious Herod, reigned in his stead, and he was as cruel as the murderer of the innocents at Bethlehem. The angel of the Lord appeared once more to Joseph in his sleep, and warned him not to expose the Child Jesus to the hatred of this wicked man. Joseph, therefore, hastening his flight, took the road to Galilee, and the Holy Family rested in their dwelling at Nazareth, so long left uncupied, and now almost in ruins.

Before long the labours of Joseph and

of Mary repaired the ruins and effaced the traces left by years of neglect. The humble house at Nazareth sheltered the Child Jesus. There it was that He grew up, while year by year the grace and Divine Wisdom which was in Him shone forth more and more; there it was that long years were passed under the eye of God, the only peaceful years which the Saviour of men was to pass upon earth, years of rest for the Blessed Mother, who saw such a Son growing up under her eyes. Of the thirty-three years that our Saviour lived in this world, thirty were passed in this happy obscurity of family life. His public life, during which He accomplished all the miracles of our redemption, only lasted three years.

How is this mystery to be explained? How can we understand the omnipotence of God fettered in the swaddling clothes of infancy, and His youth, of which the Gospel gives us hardly a glimpse, hidden in an obscure dwelling? Once only does a ray of this hidden light reach the eyes of men, when the Child Jesus appears in the Temple, before the doctors of the old law, but He returns

at once into the obscurity of Nazareth, and the whole history of these holy years is summed up in the words of the Evangelist St. Luke, "and He was subject to them."

The Eternal Word, the Son of God, subject to Joseph and Mary, and subject to them for thirty years! Shall we, like those who have eyes and see not, ears and hear not, pass by this long miracle of the Childhood of Jesus, without pausing to consider that these years of silence are the first-fruits of His mission in this world, the foundation upon which it was His will to rest His teaching, and the whole of human society?

Jesus Christ came into this world to re-open to us the gates of heaven, by expiating our sins; He came also to show us the perfect example of what man ought to be after his regeneration. He begins His life, therefore, by the practical teaching of that great duty which meets man at his entrance into the world, of that duty which comes immediately after the homage and worship which we owe to God. He teaches reverence to earthly

parents as a consequence of the reverence due to our Father who is in heaven.

When God gave His holy law to His chosen people, immediately after the first three commandments, which speak of man's duty to God, comes that solemn commandment which seems to be the transition between the duties of man towards God, and his duties to men. Thou shalt adore the Lord thy God : thou shalt not take His name in vain : thou shalt keep holy the Sabbath day : this is the homage commanded to man towards his Creator. Honour thy father and thy mother : this is man's first duty to man. Let us meditate awhile on the deep wisdom of this command of God.

What is more frail and weak than an infant at its first entrance into life ? The poor little creature hardly knows how to turn its eyes to the light ; its delicate limbs would be injured if not tenderly wrapped up, and carried in maternal arms. The only sign of its frail existence is that plaintive wailing which so deeply moves the heart of the mother, and calls forth all her tenderness to the help of this little being, who for a long time to come could

not live without her. Is this the noblest creature which God's hand has formed? Why this long weakness? Do we not see the young colts bounding in our fields, and the pretty white calves sporting on the grass whilst their mothers graze by their sides, having no other trouble than patiently to give them their milk? How bold and strong are they, at the age when our children are too weak to stand alone! All young animals play around us from their birth, or after a few days of rapid development. The mother, carrying her child in her arms, sees fluttering around her little chickens, which have but just broken their shell; whence comes this inferiority of the child to the young animals? Why is he who is one day to become a man and a lord of the creation for so long a time weaker than all other creatures? This is one of the great secrets of the Divine Wisdom. Look at this little infant. Pass over the first weeks, in which the small body alone seems to live. A day comes when that uncertain glance, which up to that time had vaguely followed the light, rests on the mother's face, which is bent over

it. This glance gradually becomes more fixed, and is lighted up with intelligence, and the infant soon recognizes and seeks her who is always there, to answer its first cry. It soon understands the tender smile which asks in return a look of love, and which first awakens its intelligence. Do you hear the mother's joyful cry? Her son has just smiled for the first time: this is the first glimmer of light in his soul. Every day will now bring progress. This little helpless body will soon become full of animation and movement, when called by the well-known voice. Its hands will be stretched out, and its eyes will be lighted up with intelligence, and before the year is ended, if the mother is a good Catholic, his eyes will seek the cross hung over his cradle, and he will kiss his little hands before the picture of Mary, his holy Mother in heaven. Here begins the mother's holy ministry. She is to her little one the first representation, and the first reflection of the goodness of God. The head of the family, the father, who already unites his tenderness to hers, to protect the child, is one day to represent God's authority; his

justice, tempered with fatherly love, is to direct the first energies of the dawning imagination, to turn the already strong but inexperienced will into a good channel, and to deter it from evil, if necessary, even with severity.

Our children are the children of Adam. Though the mercy of God, and the infinite merits of our Saviour, have opened heaven to them, there remains in them a fatal trace of our first father's sin, an inclination towards evil, against which we must strive almost as soon as the child begins its life. He must gain his bread on earth in the sweat of his brow. It is also in the sweat of his brow that he must gain eternal life. Just as we see some who unhappily prefer want to labour, and have no bread to give their children, because they drink in one day what would nourish the whole family for several weeks, so do many forget heaven, because it appears too difficult to gain, and lose their souls for miserable and fleeting pleasures.

Whose duty is it to teach the child to know God, as soon as its mind is able to understand, and to love Him with its first

affections? Whose duty is it to make of home a blessed sanctuary, far from all evil, into which good can enter on all sides, from which the child will one day come forth armed against the dangers of life, pure from all evil, adorned with virtues, and already hardened to labour? Those, most surely, in whose hands the Lord has placed this little being, and in whose hands His wisdom leaves it during those long years of weakness and slow growth. The little animal who is alone as soon as it has come into the world, and is sufficient to itself after the first months of its existence, has nothing but a body and an instinct, which God has given it, that it may be better able to serve man. And if we observe animals, beginning by the most imperfect, and going up gradually to those which God has made the companions of our labours, we shall see that the more perfect they are to become, so much the more has the Creator surrounded their early days with love and care. The insect, the fish, and the reptile, know not their mothers, and have no need of them. The young bird, who is one day to have a superior instinct,

is hatched in a wonderful nest, under the wings of a mother who has covered it night and day, enduring for its sake hunger, danger, and loss of liberty. It is tenderly nourished by its parents, and its mother teaches it to try its wings, until the little inhabitant of the air darts away, caring no longer for the nest to which it will no more return, or for the mother of whom it has no longer need. If we look at the domestic animals, at the dogs which are almost like our friends, the horses and cattle which serve us so well, we see with what instinctive tenderness they have been surrounded in their early days. We have often heard in the fields the disconsolate lowings of a cow which has been deprived of her calf. We see that the more perfect the animal, the longer is its time of weakness and dependance; as if in the tenderness which protects it there were some superior influence which developes whatever is best in its nature. By a wonderful permission of Providence this tenderness lasts just long enough for the young animal to develop completely, after which both the mother and her offspring forget each other, and this tie,

which was once so strong, exists no longer. With us, on the contrary, let us bless our Creator as we say it, the tenderness which has watched over the cradle of the infant, grows with it, and follows it step by step through life, and endures even after the last words of instruction and blessing have been spoken, and watches from heaven those whom it has guided on earth. The reason is, that human tenderness has so much more to accomplish than is effected by the less perfect affection of the animals. The most perfect amongst them have nothing but body and instinct. They have not that divine breath we call a soul, and the education of a soul created to love God, and destined to Christian perfection, and to the glories of paradise, must be longer and more difficult than that of the animal, whose only destiny is to be subject to our will. God fetters the noblest of His creatures in the long weakness of childhood, that this weakness, which attaches him to his home, may attach him also to his father and mother, and that his soul may receive during these years the instruction and progressive develop-

ment, which is to make him a man and a Christian. Hence it is that God has put **into** the mother's heart an inexhaustible tenderness, that He has animated the father's heart with that strong and fearless love which must equally nourish the body by labour and the soul by example and instruction. Hence it is that the child, as soon as it begins to learn the commandments of God, finds honour to parents placed immediately after his duty to God. Hence it is that Jesus was subject to Joseph and Mary.

But what a charge and what a responsibility for those who are fathers and mothers, to be the representatives of God in the family! What an honour and what a charge! Let us humble ourselves, and in order to promote the salvation of our children, let us endeavour to make ourselves less unworthy, and more fit for our task. No labour is easy in this world, where we must, for so God has said, gain all by the sweat of our brow. There is no treasure for which we should toil harder than the reverence of our children. Let us remember that each one of our actions, every word that drops from our

lips, leaves its traces in the hearts of these little beings, even when we imagine that they are taking no notice. Nothing is unseen or unnoticed by a child. He learns only by what surrounds him, having as yet no stores within himself, and he is accordingly gifted with a wonderful facility in hearing and remembering. Let us be careful lest this providential faculty cause his ruin if we put evil before him, where it is the will of God that he should see nothing but good. We cannot deceive our children; our words will have authority only if our whole lives have gained their reverence. Our commands will only be respected if our children have learnt by our example to conquer themselves, to prefer duty to their own pleasure. Force will avail nothing if we only obtain by it a useless triumph over the weakness of our children; their will and intelligence will ever secretly rebel, until they are strong enough to resist us face to face.

Parents must be honoured that they may be loved, and loved that they may be obeyed. And as they teach their children to obey them for God's sake, they must

also bring them up for God. Their manner towards them must not be influenced by impatience, by caprice, or by the annoyance felt amidst daily cares and occupations. A frown on the father's brow saddens the whole family; and a wrongful impatience on his part does still more harm, for not only does it cast needless sorrow on the little ones, who are the joy of the household, but it produces bad and impatient feelings in these young hearts, and we all know that ill weeds spring more readily than good seeds. If we wish to see our children good, we must ourselves improve as the child grows older. What a great work is this! What a happiness to see this little innocent creature grow up, to watch the evil shoots daily disappearing, and virtue growing in their stead. What is more beautiful, more pure and more filled with hope for earth and heaven, than a Christian child? One day, the holy Gospel tells us, some women of Judea brought their little children to our Saviour, that He might bless them, and the disciples rebuked them, "whom when Jesus saw, He was much displeased, and saith to them, Suffer the little chil-

dren to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”*

Let us also, like these pious mothers, present our children to Jesus, that He may bless them, and as they clothed them in their best to take them into His holy presence, so let us clothe them in innocence and simplicity, to present them to Him each day. Our gentle Saviour loved them so deeply; and one day He placed a child in the midst of His disciples, and having embraced it, He said, “Whosoever shall receive one such child as this in My name receiveth Me.”†

Let us not be anxious, therefore, as to the fate of our children; they are like those children whom Jesus blessed, they will want for nothing even in this world, for they will be honoured by all as the living images of our Saviour. But first we must ourselves receive them in our Saviour’s name, and when we have brought them up for Him, the presence of the Christian child will sanctify and console us as though the Child Jesus

* St. Mark x. 14.

† St. Mark ix. 36.

Himself was in the midst of us, and our dwellings, poor though they may be, will become the image of the happy home at Nazareth.

Prayer.

O holy Mother of God, teach us that true tenderness from which all selfishness is banished, and by which, far from loving ourselves in our children, we may love in them souls redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and destined for heaven, Christians called to be His servants. Mother of Christ, teach us to reverence in them the image of thy Divine Son. Mother of divine grace, teach us to pray for them as thou dost pray for us. Mother most pure, obtain for us purity of heart, that we may not scandalize our children by doing the evil which we forbid to them. Mother most amiable, give gentleness to our words, and a charm to our teaching, that we may make them love the law of God. Mother most admirable, make our children see in us the example of the good we teach them. Mother of our Creator, ask of Him to create in us a

new heart, tender and wise enough for so great a mission. Mother of our Saviour, obtain from Him that He would raise up these young sons of Adam when they fall, and save them from all evil when we can no longer preserve them from it. Amen.

Practice.

To love our children for God's sake.
To bring them up for Him, and not for ourselves.

EIGHTEENTH DAY.

THE INFANT JESUS IN THE TEMPLE.—

FIRST COMMUNION.

Years passed away, and the Infant Jesus grew in age, and wisdom, and grace, before God and before men. As He grew older, the grace and divine wisdom with which He was filled shone forth more and more brightly. Yesterday we were admiring the light thrown on the life of the Holy Family by the simple words of the Gospel. The Child grew under the eye of God His Father ; His divine grace shed a charm of peace on the rough labours of this poor household ; Infinite Wisdom shone on His young brow, and enlightened it with such sweet gravity, and such wonderful majesty, that even human observers were struck, and each one said to himself: "The blessing of God is on this Child !"

With what silent wonder, with what tenderness mingled with deep reverence did Mary and Joseph see these treasures of

holiness daily develope themselves ! They worshipped their God in this Child, so gentle and so simple, who worked for them, was obedient to their voice, and loved them ! What is there upon earth more sweet than the simple trust and devoted tenderness of a good son ? And if God gives us so much happiness in the tenderness of our children, what grace, what an unspeakable charm must there have been in the tenderness of the Infant God ! But the Blessed Virgin Mary did not pass these beautiful years without suffering. She is called the Mother of Sorrows. The most afflicted among us has never suffered anything that this spotless creature has not suffered before him. Fear and uneasiness are in this world the portion of mothers. When they see their child growing, and think of all the dangers, all the sufferings, which their tenderness cannot spare him, oh, how many are their tears, their long watches, and their prayers ! How many times, after having looked at her children, joyous and careless as they are at that innocent age, the mother's face becomes grave, and her eyes fill with tears. She is thinking

of the time when the child, still young, will leave home and begin his toilsome life by working amongst strangers. And then her thought goes still farther.* She sees him a young man, drawn by lot, and sent as a soldier, leaving his village, and his old parents, who have so much need of his strong arms, perhaps to incur many dangers. Under different forms every mother knows this anguish, for labour and dangers are the portion of all men in this world. Mary also has known them, and with a bitterness that we can hardly understand. Had not Simeon told her that her beloved Son would be a sign to be contradicted? Were not the Holy Scriptures also the constant subject of her meditations? Did she not see in the prophets the history of the Man of Sorrows traced even in its smallest details? and that which was obscure to the Jews could not be so to a mind illuminated with light as was hers, to a soul in which sin, pride, or rebellion had never raised clouds to obscure the truth. Even sup-

* This refers to the conscription which is carried on in France, by which young men drawn by lot are forced to become soldiers, whether they will or no.—*Trans.*

posing that God spared His handmaid the clear sight of the Passion, such as it was to be, did she not read in every page that her Son would bear all the burden of the iniquities of His people, and would save them by taking on Himself their chastisement? Let us then picture to ourselves, on one side that infinite glory, that unparalleled happiness which the presence of the Infant Jesus, His tenderness for His Mother, and His least words, caused to Mary; and on the other, the certainty of terrible sufferings, be they what they might, and judge what Mary must have suffered. We know that, by praying to God for our child, by preparing him for life by a good Christian education, we can keep off many dangers, and spare him many sorrows; but she, the spotless Mother, condemned to suffer more than all other mothers, she knew that her Son was only come into this world for that inevitable Passion, the bitterness of which would surpass that of all human sorrows, as much as the Incarnate God surpassed the mere sons of Adam. Each new ray of heavenly intelligence, which she saw appear in Him, reminded her that this trea-

sure did not belong to her, that she would soon see Him leave that poor home, the obscurity of which still protected Him. Each day brought nearer the end of these peaceful years, and the beginning of the mission of sorrow.

On a certain day, when the Child Jesus was twelve years old, the Holy Family set out on a journey, with their kindred and friends of Nazareth.* The feast of the Passover was approaching, and the faithful Jews betook themselves to Jerusalem, to worship the true God in the only temple in which as yet He was pleased to manifest His greatness. From all parts of Judea, from all the countries in which the Jews had remained settled since the captivity, the crowd of believers assembled to celebrate the first deliverance of the people of God and to eat the pasch in remembrance of the exodus from Egypt. The word pasch, signifies passage. At the time of their passage from the land of slavery to the land of promise, the captive Israelites

* Archelaus was no longer king. Having made himself odious through his cruelties, he had been deprived of his kingdom by Augustus, and banished to Vienne, in Dauphiny. There was therefore now no longer any danger in taking the Child Jesus to Jerusalem.

received from God the command to sacrifice a lamb in each family and eat it standing, their loins girded about, as travellers, staffs in their hands, and to mark the door of every dwelling with its blood, so that the destroying angel who was to strike all the firstborn of Egypt might pass without stopping before the threshold of the servants of God. That spotless lamb, whose blood preserved the children of Israel from death was a type of the Holy Victim who was to be sacrificed for the salvation of the world. This pasch, eaten every year by the faithful Jews, was the type of that unleavened bread which Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, Himself transformed into His own Body and Blood, and which His Apostles and priests, in His name, transform in the same way for the food of our souls. Our Saviour consecrated anew the holy solemnity of the Pasch, by the remembrance of His glorious resurrection, and commands all His servants to come on that day and to partake, no longer of the typical lamb, but of the true Victim, Whose Blood has saved us from eternal death. But as His mercy has infinitely multiplied the graces

given formerly to the children of Israel, this Pasch, eaten only once a year, in one only temple upon earth, is now daily offered to souls by Jesus Christ. He dwells amongst us in thousands of sanctuaries. The poorest church in the poorest village is richer far than the temple of Jerusalem; for the Incarnate God Himself dwells there in His adorable Flesh and Blood. And whilst even the most faithful Jews remained in the courts of the temple, far from the sanctuary, into which the priest alone had the right to penetrate, and where anything profane would have been struck with death, the greatest of sinners can come and kneel before our tabernacles, where the God of mercy awaits him with open arms; confession and a few sincere tears can give him back his place at the table of the Father of the family.

Who then was to bring about this marvellous development, this infinite multiplication of the Paschal Feast? Hear what the holy Gospel tells us. "And when He was twelve years old, they, going up into Jerusalem, according to the custom of the feast, and having fulfilled

the days, when they returned the Child Jesus remained in Jerusalem; and His parents knew it not. And, thinking that He was in the company, they came a day's journey, and sought Him amongst their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And not finding Him, they returned into Jerusalem, seeking Him. And it came to pass that after three days they found Him in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard Him were astonished at His wisdom and His answers. And seeing Him, they wondered. And His Mother said to Him: Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing. And He said to them: How is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"*

Poor Mother! she had sought her Son during three days in dreadful anguish; she found Him again, and He said to her, "Why have you sought Me?" The voice and look of the Child had in them something grave and supernatural, which made

* St. Luke ii.

His Mother tremble. "I must be about My Father's business." Poor Mother! this was the first call to that Divine Mission which was the source of our salvation and of thy tears. Is He then about to leave thee so young, and go wandering over this ungrateful earth, where His own will not receive Him? Mary kept silence; she listened with anguish in her heart, but with deep reverence, to the grave and sublime words which flowed from those childish lips, and filled the doctors with wonder. Take comfort, holy Virgin, the time is not yet come. Thy Child returns to thee; His glance is as tender, and His ways are as simple, as in past times, and whilst the ancients and the doctors follow Him with their eyes, and ask themselves if it is indeed that Child who has been speaking to them, He takes thy hand and returns with thee to Nazareth. "And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth: and was subject to them. And His Mother kept all these words in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age, and grace with God and men."*

* St. Luke ii.

This part of the life of Jesus and of His holy Mother is filled, like all the rest, with the highest teaching for us. Our Saviour was twelve years old; the days of His early childhood were passed. For the first time Joseph and Mary took Him to Jerusalem to eat the Pasch. Then for the first time a ray of His Divinity shone before the eyes of men. He said to His Mother, with a firmness new in Him, "I must be about My Father's business." There is also an age at which Christian parents for the first time lead their child to the foot of the altar, to eat the Pasch of the new law, and when the future Christian, enlightened in his faith, and firm in will, is for the first time to be seen in that young disciple of Jesus, when he is to say voluntarily, and for all his life: "I must be about my Father's business." And the age is generally that at which the Infant Jesus went to celebrate the Pasch at Jerusalem.

As soon as a son of Adam is born the Church receives him into her arms, and the holy water of baptism cleanses him from the stain of original sin, and makes him a Christian. But the new-born child

neither asks for nor understands the wonderful grace he receives. His young soul still sleeps. By degrees, as he grows, the teaching of his mother, and the pious example of a Christian family, should make him acquainted with the grace already received, and inspire him with love for the God of goodness, who has in store for him so many other favours. But as soon as infancy is past, and the ideas of the child develope and take form, more serious teaching must be united to that of his mother. The Church herself, through her ministers, must interfere to teach him the great truths of our Faith. Our task is to prepare the ground well, to pick out the stones, and to pull up the brambles and thorns. But when once our labour has done this, and the good season is come, we must call to our aid the Divine Sower; He it is who, by the holy instructions of our pastors, will sow the good seed in the heart of the child. Then his mind will open to the things of God. He will learn those holy laws which command men to pray as he has always prayed, but hitherto only in obedience to his mother, and to perform those duties which he has performed

almost without understanding them. He will learn to know still better the God whom he has loved from his earliest years, and when the blessed day of his First Communion comes, voluntarily and with all his heart, will he renew the promises which his godfather and godmother made for him on the day of his baptism. He will labour voluntarily to purify his heart, and to adorn it with virtues, to receive Jesus, who is pleased to come down into it. He will voluntarily make the holy resolutions which are to influence his whole life. Let us take heed not to lose these precious years of preparation for First Communion. Let us be regular in sending our children to the catechism instructions. And let Christian mothers redouble their zeal during this time, which will so greatly influence the future Christian life of their children in this world, and their eternal salvation in the next. If their work prevents them from being themselves present at the instructions, let them at least make their children repeat them at home in the evening, so as to be sure that they are understood. Those parents who can read should hold

the catechism in their hands, while their children repeat what they have learnt. Thus the labour of the priest will be lessened, and he will have more time to explain what the child already knows by heart. Those who cannot themselves read will surely find some kind neighbour to help them in this task, and to catechise their children together with her own. Then let the mother do what none can do so well as her; let her speak of God to her child; above all, she must give him a good example, and more than ever, at this time, when everything should unite to prepare and sanctify his soul. She must reverence this young soul, so soon about to become the sanctuary of the living God. Let us remember that one bad word, one sign, I do not say of irreverence, for I hope that not one of us is capable of that, but of indifference to the holy things he is taught in his catechism, may check the fervour of his soul, and close it to the love of God. Alas! what misery, what a terrible responsibility! Let us remember these words of our Saviour: "Whosoever shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in Me;

it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.”* Let us rightly understand this great act of First Communion. It is often sad to see parents regarding this event, so serious and so decisive for the Christian future of their children, with merely human feelings, which prove that they understand neither its great sanctity, nor its great importance. The child cannot be placed in a situation before his First Communion.* The good old customs of our fathers have established that, unless in a case of great necessity, he should remain under the eye of his parents, to be educated, and to prepare himself for his First Communion, and not leave his family until he is instructed in the truths of his religion, and fortified with that divine Food which is to be the strength and support of his whole life. It is a pious custom, and should be observed. The poor child, who is going so far, perhaps, from his father’s house, has great need to be prepared for this rude life, and to bear in his heart and

* St. Mark ix. 41.

† This, of course, only applies to Catholic countries.

in his memory, something to console and guard him. How sad to see parents hastening thoughtlessly and without reverence the time fixed for the First Communion, and irritated when the wisdom of their pastors refuse what they ask against the interest and the eternal salvation of their children. "We cannot support him," they say, "he must have a situation, and gain his livelihood, as we do." It is a hard thing to gain bread for a numerous family, there is no doubt of that; but let not parents deceive themselves, let them not suppose the child fit to leave his family until they have prepared him to live as a Christian and an honest man. They may one day bitterly repent having sent him far from them before he well knew God and his duties. Let them give their child the alms of another year's teaching, if it be necessary. They never refused him bread when he was too young to work, and when the care which his weakness required prevented his mother from working herself. Now that he is stronger, let him work with his mother. She should do for his soul what she has done for his body. She

should support her child until he is old enough to understand what he must know before receiving his God in holy Communion. Let us remember these words of the Child Jesus: "I must be about My Father's business." They apply wonderfully to the life of the Christian child during the two years that precede his First Communion. That should be the chief business; nothing should interfere with the catechism. For that there is neither excuse nor delay. Where he is taught to know his Heavenly Father there should he be.

If parents are thus faithful in preparation for the First Communion, what a blessing will be theirs. Their child will then be the faithful image of the Infant Jesus at the same age. They will see on his open brow a reflection of the Divine wisdom. They will wonder at the progress of his young mind, and sometimes his knowledge of the law of God, his ingenuous faith, the grave teaching that he repeats with such simplicity, will cause in them a feeling almost like that of Mary, when she heard the Child Jesus answering the doctors in the temple. That miracle

has been more than once renewed : there are people in the world who have passed their whole lives in study, and yet know not so much as a little child of twelve, who knows his catechism well, and loves God with his whole soul. Their hearts, are proud, they wish to judge and discuss that which we must simply know and believe, because God has revealed it; and because Faith is wanting to them, they are and remain all their lives poor ignorant creatures, in spite of their useless labour.

Let us also ever remember that our child belongs, not to us, but to his Father who is in heaven. Let us consider this still more seriously when the first years of his life are past, and the age is come at which his young soul has to do directly and voluntarily with God. Let us have no thought but of making him a good Christian, and let us not believe that that hinders us from making him clever in his profession or trade, and a useful man to his family and to society. Will not he who works through a sense of duty, and sees heaven as the reward of every effort, have more courage than he

who works merely to gain his daily bread? Let us make our child a good Christian, that he may be a good workman; in order that he may perform actively and honestly the duties of this world, let us accustom him to look upon them only as a means of reaching heaven.

The tenderness of good parents for their children should be wise and generous. All their personal wishes should yield to consideration for his salvation. They should be perfect as their Father in heaven is perfect, that their fatherly authority may be an image of the divine authority, and that their guidance may be to their child a visible representation of God's Providence. In this as in all else, they will find self-sacrifice, a sacrifice of their pleasure, of their tendency to over-indulgence, or of their impatience. They should reverence in their child the image of the Child Jesus. Wherever is the business of God his Father, thither should they guide him with all the strength of their understanding, and in a spirit of self-sacrifice. How great will be their reward! When the humble Mary, with perfect obedience, had accepted this

first word, which began the mission of her Son, Jesus took her hand, returned with her and St. Joseph to the cottage at Nazareth, and, as the Gospel tells us, was subject to them. When Christian parents have brought up their child in the love of God from his earliest years, when they have deprived themselves of his work that he may always attend the First Communion instructions, they will see him return to their homes like an angel of benediction, bringing with him obedience, courage in labour, and that pure holiness of childhood which sanctifies all around it. If the cruel necessities of life oblige them to send him from them, they will at least have the joy of knowing him to be furnished with that strength which comes from on high, and which, when he is far from them, and deprived of the safeguard of his home, will keep him holy, honest, and happy, supported by his Faith and by his God Whom he bears in his heart. And how will they rejoice when their old age is cared for, and their grey hairs are revered by that good child, who will have become a good Christian, a good labourer, and a devoted son, because they

have been devoted parents. If we desire to reap in the autumn, let us sow in the spring, and may God aid our efforts by sending down His blessing on us and on our children.

Prayer.

Holy Virgin Mary, thou whose heart, so resigned in its anguish, had the courage to offer to God the sacrifice of thy Infant God, teach us to love our children as a sacred trust, of which we are the guardians but not the masters. Teach us to consider their souls as a garden belonging to our Lord, where nothing should be sown but what pleases Him, and from which nothing should be pulled up but what displeases Him. Above all, dear Mother, obtain by thy powerful intercession, that our watchfulness may be redoubled, and that our disinterestedness may be increased, when, for the first time, the householder is about to visit His garden, so that our humble labour may be united to the dews of heaven, to call forth flowers of virtue from a soil cleared of every evil weed. Be thyself, O blessed Mother

of Jesus, the Mother of our little children, so that, after the example of thy Divine Son, they may grow in grace and in wisdom before God and before men.

Practice.

Never to allow our children to miss the catechism instructions.

NINETEENTH DAY.

JESUS AT LABOUR.

"In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread."—Gen. iii. 19.

When the Christians of our day go to seek at Nazareth the traces of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, they find at about a hundred paces from the precious dwelling of which I have already said so much, a little chapel, half-hidden amongst ruins. The monks at Nazareth say Mass there every day, and tradition attaches to the poor chapel, and to the ruins which surround it, the name of the workshop of St. Joseph. There the venerable descendant of the kings of Juda had passed his youth before becoming the spouse of Mary; there had he afterwards established his humble workshop; there, during the long years of the Hidden Life which passed between the appearance of the Saviour as a Child in the Temple, and the death of him whom men called His

father, Jesus laboured by his side, first as a Child, and then as a Young Man. It was the will of Jesus that His own early years should be spent like those of other children ; the rough apprenticeship, the young and still weak hands, which tremble under the weight of heavy tools, then, as strength came, the hard and courageous labour during the long hours of the day—all this did Jesus experience. Young workmen find in Him their model. What labour was ever more patient, more careful, more intelligent, than that of Jesus ? Masters also find their model in St. Joseph. What master was ever more gentle, more fatherly, more venerable, in all his actions, more edifying in his language, than the holy carpenter of Nazareth ? If there were more masters like St. Joseph, young workmen would have less difficulty in being like Jesus, their divine Model and ours. No rough or coarse word or imprecation on the part of the master, no complaints from the apprentice, dishonoured the venerable walls of Joseph's workshop, and if the sweat of labour were often on their brow, their

countenances never ceased to shine with peace.

May not our wives and mothers find a model in her who worked far from them, but always for them; in her who prepared for them their poor clothes with such skilful hands that at the very foot of the Cross the executioners of Christ cast lots for that coat without a seam which His Mother had spun and woven for Him? When, towards evening, Joseph, already bent with age, returned slowly home, supported by the loving arm of his son Jesus, the meal was ready. The same devoted and active hand had multiplied the resources of poverty to restore their strength, and made their food more wholesome by greater care and pains. Wives perhaps little know how much the strength of their husbands and sons depends upon their intelligence and activity, and on the care they take that everything should be clean, wholesome, and abundant at the family table. If disorder and hunger are found in a house, it is nearly always the fault of the wife, and the husband and sons, resembling Jesus and Joseph as little as she resembles Mary, go to seek

elsewhere what they cannot find in the home which she does not strive to make pleasant to them, unless sadness and discouragement take possession of their hearts, and they sit in the corner of the sad hearth, as negligent of their own duty as the wife is of hers.

Joy is then extinguished in the home as is the fire in the grate: the furniture, which cleanliness would cause to shine, and which labour would make durable, dishonours the house by its sad appearance of decay and age; mud covers the floor; the torn clothing of the family bears no trace of an industrious needle; the sun itself can hardly enter the window, upon the panes of which lies more than a year's dust. There is in truth nothing agreeable to look at, not even the faces of the little children, for under the sad disorder which throws over them a sort of veil it is hard to discover the beauty of their age. Is this then the inevitable effect of poverty? No; for next door you may see a similar house in which all the furniture has quite another look, in which everything shines, and which seems much more roomy from the order which pre-

vails; in which the double light of the sun and of the cheerful hearth spreads an air of comfort which rejoices the heart. Look at the faces of the inmates; is there not in them also the reflection of another light, a light which comes from heaven, and which shines on the foreheads of the good servants whom God rewards, and which is called peace of conscience, the joy of duty performed? What is the great difference between these two homes, the one so sad and the other so consoling? Is it unhappiness independent of the will, and shared more or less by every son of Adam? No; for in the saddest days one of these dwellings will be less miserable than the other in its happiest; submission will take the place of joy, and peace will be there whatever may happen. In the other, joy and comfort cannot remain. What then is wanting to it? What more have they next door? One thing is wanting, which is very powerful in this world: Labour. How comes it that the duty which was our sentence should be the efficacious means of happiness in this world? First, because the word of God cannot change, and because,

since that sentence pronounced against man when he had sinned, "thou shalt eat thy bread in the sweat of thy brow," there is nothing in this world which we can obtain without labour. The bread which nourishes us, the comfort of our homes, the security of our future, the reverence of our children, the honour which we shall leave them as an inheritance, all is gained with difficulty in the sweat of our brow; therefore, if we wish for happiness we must labour, for God Himself has said, "If you do not labour the earth will bear only thorns and thistles." Secondly, it is because our great God is as merciful as He is just, and "even in wrath He remembereth mercy."

Out of the necessities of our misery He has made means of salvation, and whilst human justice never softens by gentle means the pain it inflicts, His grace cures the wounds inflicted on us by His justice, and rewards our efforts as if they were made for His sake alone.

There is no existence which labour will not ennoble; there is none which is dispensed from it. We may sometimes be tempted to hate poverty, thinking

that it alone condemns us to labour. Let us not thus deceive ourselves. No son of Adam is dispensed from it. Every one alike is punished if he avoids it, and the rich man, who may at first sight appear to be out of the common law, is more to be pitied than the poor, if he does not work, for he will suffer in his soul all that they suffer in their bodies. I would a thousand times rather be the poor labourer returning contentedly to his home, after a hard day's work, than the idle man, who is restless and gloomy because he has lying useless within him an intelligence and a soul given him to further God's work on earth, and for the good of his brethren.

Labour is the great law of the world. God has made the earth like a great workshop, of which He is the Head, and in which He has placed masters and workmen, and in which all must labour, each in his place. The sentence of God does not apply to those alone who gain their bread by daily toil. Each one has his part in the work, but God in His wisdom has deputed to each his task, like the intelligent master, who sets each workman to

the work which suits him best. One works with his strong arm, another with his mind enlightened by study; some invent and calculate, others execute. And for these different tasks the apprenticeship begins early, and is the more laborious as the work requires more intelligence. While happy peasant children are amusing themselves in the fields, drinking in from the pure air of the mountains the strength which will make them one day sturdy labourers, the rich man's son is sitting over his books, sacrificing his liberty and his play, which he likes as well as other children, in the hope of making himself more capable of one day becoming useful to others. Many a peasant boy would soon grow weary if he had to change places with the young master. Many perhaps would find the life of people who do not dig and work with their hands hard enough. Look around. While the labourer tills the earth, that it may produce the nourishment of the body, the holy priest, for example, devotes his life to hard mental work and difficult studies, to nourish souls, to enlighten the intelligence

of the poor, to succour their needs, and to support them in the ways of God from their birth until their death. Both work, each in his own way, but both laboriously; both exert to the utmost the faculties which have been given them for their own good and for that of their brethren.

All work done with zeal, devotion, intelligence, and with the desire of pleasing God and fulfilling His law, is equally honourable, and the honour which comes from work is proportioned to the work itself. The more courageous and ennobled by pious motives is the work, the more honour is attached to it, even in the eyes of men, for they are not so unjust as they are said to be, and if sometimes in their weakness they praise the success of a dishonest man, there is always something in them which despises him, and which makes them pay a secret homage to him who, in whatever position he may be placed, generously gains his bread in the sweat of his brow. The rich man, whose fortune is the legitimate and honest result of the labour of his fathers, will only be truly respected if he enters himself into

the same career of labour of which he already enjoys the fruits, and serves his country and society, like a generous workman, who has been paid in advance, and therefore is all the more attached to his duty. The poor man who labours will never be despised; nay more, he will be honoured if, through courage and intelligence, he makes a virtue of necessity, if he loves his work, and if, in addition to bodily strength, he employs in its performance intelligence and good sense. Any labourer, however humble, may perfect what he knows. The greatest discoveries of art and industry have been made by simple men who have been guided towards useful inventions by intelligence and common sense. The sciences themselves are the result of observation. They contribute much towards perfecting industry, but they need the help of the practical workman. Everything is connected, and gives mutual aid when society goes on as God would have it.

Without the man of science the workman would have been able to do nothing, without the workman the discoveries of the man of science would have been of no

avail. The first is a force which needs direction, the second is an intelligence which needs practical application. In a society of men, as in a single human body, the head conceives, the hand executes; and as the head and the hand are necessary to a man, so are all kinds of labour necessary to the great body called society. To love our work, to devote ourselves to it with ardour, to open our minds to every idea of progress, to respect the customs of our fathers, but to be always seeking to add some perfection to them, to take another step in the road they took, by learning what was not known in their day, as they learnt what was not known in their father's time; this is the law of progress, which ends by bettering the condition of all men. Every one contributes his share to it, and afterwards reaps the benefit.

As I said in the beginning of the chapter, no law of God brings with it more evidently its own reward or punishment. When man neglects the duty of labour, suffering is not long in coming; weariness of self and disorder are the effects of this neglect. If the subsistence and com-

fort of the family depend upon our labour, indolence will cause them suffering and privation. If our position, the fruit of the labour of our fathers, places us above this danger, still our unoccupied minds will be dwarfed like a plant, the cultivation of which is neglected. It has been said that idleness is the mother of all evil. It leaves the mind and heart a prey to all temptations; it hardens the soul to the sufferings of others, which it takes no pains to relieve. When once a man has entered on this road of disorder and sloth, in rebellion against this first law of God, he is in a wrong path, and he does not stand still; he becomes daily more selfish, and seeks nothing but the means to satisfy his degraded taste, or his shameful passions. On the other hand, when a man enters boldly and joyously on the career of labour which is traced out for him, in which his intelligence adds to his strength, when he is always seeking to enlighten himself, that he may be more useful to others, even if not compelled by poverty to labour; when the whole family work for the same object, when father, mother, and

children, give an example of good will, of earnestness, and of ardour in well-doing; then the law of God is accomplished. Then the whole family, and each member of it feels true joy in the sense of submission to duty, and the heart is open to all the good inspirations from which virtues spring. And once more, the world which is said to be so unjust, seldom is so; consideration is attached to those who deserve it, and the good workman, the good father, and the laborious family, will commonly have their reward in this world, before they come to enjoy it in heaven.

Labour, doubtless, is not sufficient of itself to make us saints, or happy people. Like everything beautiful or fruitful on this earth, it must receive life and blessing from God. Selfish labour bears only the fruits of death; pride, luxury, or avarice. It must be inspired by the love of God, and accompanied by self-sacrifice, love of our neighbour, and self-devotion, to make it one of the most beneficial powers in this world. Hence was it the will of our Saviour to give us an example of it, by obeying at once His adopted father, the poor carpenter of Nazareth, and His

Heavenly Father, the Creator of the world, Who blesses all labour when it is good. We read in the book of Genesis that as God brought out of nothing each new wonder, He considered it, and saw that His work was good. And when He had finished, He saw all the things that He had made, and they were very good. This is what our Lord deigns to do for each one of our works, infinitely small as they, even the greatest, are in His sight. He looks at them, and if He judges them good, He blesses them, and makes them bear their fruit for the present, and their seed for the future. Happy shall we be if, when He examines them as a whole, He sees that they are very good in proportion to our weakness! Who will ever be discouraged with his work when he thinks that it has been given him by that supreme Lord who will judge and reward him? Who will not understand the honour of labour, when he thinks that the Creator gives him a share in His own work, by using poor human hands to perfect and make useful the creations of His omnipotence? Without Him we can do nothing, but what things does He not

deign to do through us! What transformations are not made by our work through His blessing! What is not made by laborious hands from wood, stone, and metal! Apart from Him, what are we? With Him, what power do we not possess!

Yes, we labour for God and with God, and He is in the midst of us, the great and incomparable Worker. In this great workshop, which we call the world, He has collected all the first things necessary to our work. It is not His will that we should use them without trouble, but it is His will that our trouble should have its reward. He watches us, and directs and pays us according to our resolution and skill.

Who made and who gave to the poor man the bread he eats? My labour, he would say: I have toiled, sowed, and reaped; the miller converted the corn into flour, and each labour has brought its fruit, even to that of the housewife, who has made the bread for the family all the better in proportion as she has taken more pains with it. True; but when the seed was sown, Who sent the

autumn rains on the fields? Who placed in the seed that powerful blade which pierces the earth and appears above ground, whilst the root fixes itself firmly in the earth, and draws from it living sap? And when the young corn has shewn its green head, and the winter wind begins to blow, Who covers over it a mantle of snow, to shelter it during so many cold nights, which the poor little plant had to pass without shelter? Who brought the warm days of spring, and then the summer sun to ripen the harvest? It is the great Master, the great WORKMAN, more skilful than any of us. When our labour has done all it can, He comes and finishes the work. Look at this coal, which is brought so many miles to heat the lime kilns. By means of this coal, and the heat it will produce in burning, God will bring out a quality in another stone which shall fertilize the fields, and besides, this coal will become the strength of machines, the movement of trains, the light of reflectors, and the heat of the forge and the hearth. Strength, movement, light, and heat, all this is hidden by God in a piece of black coal,

but only on condition that men work hard at digging and excavating far from the pure air and light, to bring out of the earth this hidden treasure.

Have we ever noticed that all these gifts of God are given to us gratuitously ? We have only to give ourselves the trouble to take them. Water, fire, air, and forces of all kinds, are given to us freely. Add to them a little labour, and all these gifts become the property of man. He enjoys, modifies, or increases them ; he keeps or distributes them, or gives them to his children. He labours thus for his own benefit and for conscience sake ; he labours for his family, and thus his heart and his most tender affections unite with his interests to excite him to labour.

Respect the rights of property : they are the fruit of labour. The father of the family feels his trouble lighter when he thinks that each burden he takes on his own shoulders will be lightened from those of his children. What should we say of one who could grudge the sons of the hardy labourer the bread he has gained for them ? It is not less unjust to deprive the descendants of what has been

gained by the labour of their forefathers ; and the time will never come that the legitimate produce of labour is not the legitimate property of the family. And, further, if the sons follow piously in the footsteps of their fathers, this property, left to them by the dead, becomes to the survivors a means of labour, not for themselves alone, but for others. All labour is of service to the workmen and to all his fellow men.

But it must always be remembered that in order to make labour blessed and fruitful, and that the comfort it produces may be shed on all, it must be inspired and directed by God. Masters and workmen must piously receive their work from the Great Master, Who alone knows how to combine all forces for the good of each.

Though man has been obliged to labour, in all times, and all over the earth, yet it is only since the Christian religion was founded that labour has been honoured and free. Before Christianity slavery was everywhere found. Outside Christianity slavery still exists. And even in our Christian countries, when faith becomes weaker, this beautiful order

is disturbed. Labour has no longer its principle of life, and God abandons to their rebellion these ungrateful labourers. Then is there nothing but hardness, injustice, and rough language from the master to the labourer, and hatred, jealousy, and bitterness from the labourer towards the master. But where God is obeyed, justice and kindness reign with Him, and all classes unite to serve Him, and love each other in order to please Him.

It is to teach us these great truths, to raise man in our estimation, and to prove to us the use of labour, that Jesus Himself, and Joseph, Mary, and the Apostles were labourers. As a great general multiplies himself by his zeal, and appears to his soldiers at every post of danger to encourage them to fresh efforts, so our Redeemer appears to us at all the most difficult parts of our journey in this world. Wherever we find Jesus let us walk without hesitation, it is the way of true honour and of sanctity. If He had been a mere man, like us, He would have chosen, as men do, power, empire, and fortune; He would have desired to make Himself a general, a conqueror, or an em-

peror. But Jesus is God, and He came to save man. Now man, by a decree of that eternal Justice which our Redeemer came to fulfil, and not abolish, passes the greater part of his life in toil, and generally in the labour of the hands. Therefore did He give the greater part of His own life to labour, to the labour of His Hands. He has taught us the nobility of labour; and whereas, before His time philosophers cried: "These occupations are only fit for degraded slaves," since His coming a philosopher has been able to say: "The only difference between the king on his throne and the shepherd on the mountain, is that their occupations are not the same. But their moral merit in performing them well is the same, and thus it is that God can weigh us all with the same weights, and in the same balance."*

* Theodore Jouffroy.

Prayer.

O Mary, Patron and example of those who labour, Queen of our workshops, of our fields, and of our dwellings; Mary, most laborious and most diligent, teach us to see in labour, our duty, our joy, our honour, and our interest, the future of our children, the riches of our country, the order of the universe, and the will of God. Teach us, through the example of thy Divine Son, to labour for Him, like Him, and with Him, to make our family a holy family, and our home a house of Nazareth. Amen.

Practice.

To submit to labour as to a law. To find in labour an honour in this world, and a hope in the next. Whilst labouring, to think first of God, next of our family, and lastly of ourselves.

TWENTIETH DAY.

DEATH OF ST. JOSEPH.

“ O grave, where is thy victory ? O death, where is thy sting ? ”—St. Paul, I. Ep. Cor. xv. 55.

I remember once seeing a beautiful picture. The painter had lived in solitude and prayer ; he had meditated much before God, and his hand had well expressed the holy thoughts of his soul. I have never forgotten either this picture or the artist's explanation of his work. Would that our conference of to-day might make the same impression upon us all. This picture represented the poor house at Nazareth. Humbly stretched on a pallet, the aged St. Joseph seemed at the point of death ; his eyes were closed, but by his joined hands, and his lips, on which there was a smile, he seemed still to be in prayer, and on that venerable countenance there was a peace and joy which made this scene of sorrow sweet to

look upon. At the head of this bed of death, Jesus was seated in divine majesty and filial tenderness ; with one hand He was supporting the head of the patriarch, with the other He was blessing him, and the gentle Saviour, who was moved by the grief of the widow of Naim, and at the tomb of Lazarus, restrained not His tears at the last sufferings of him whom He had called father. At the feet of the dying saint, the Blessed Virgin was praying and weeping. She saw departing the holy protector of her youth, the companion of her first sufferings ; she knew that she would soon remain alone on earth. There was but one radiant face in this picture ; it was that of the dying saint.

Who would not wish to die thus in the arms of Jesus and of Mary ! Happy Joseph ! For him the passage will be very short between the place of sorrowful exile in which the just of the old law are awaiting their deliverance, and the heaven the gates of which Jesus is about to open to him. His head is resting on the heart of Him who will one day say, “ I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth

in Me shall not die for ever." And Joseph believed in Him, believed with his whole soul; his life was consecrated to preserving Him, loving Him, and defending Him. His last sigh breathed forth an act of faith and love. Thus death, conquered beforehand, cannot trouble the calm confidence of his soul, and the smile of happiness which beams on his countenance seems to say: "O grave, where is thy victory, O death where is thy sting?" Let us often ponder on the blessed end of St. Joseph. The piety of the believers of old has chosen him as the patron of a good death, and proposes him to us as an example and an intercessor in that terrible hour towards which we are drawing nearer every day of our lives; but we must not wait until our last hour to imitate his holy example. To die like St. Joseph we must also live like him. We know well that the necessity of dying is the just chastisement with which sinful man was struck. "If thou eatest of this fruit thou shalt die." Such was God's just warning to Adam. A life of labour, fatigue, and suffering, ending with death, such is the horizon which opened before

him after his fall. Before reaching the end of his own chastisement, Adam saw his innocent son perish, struck by the hand of his wicked brother. Good or wicked, innocent or guilty, all must suffer, labour, and die. Such is the sentence which the just wrath of God lays upon the whole human race.

But let us once again admire and bless with our whole soul the goodness of our God, whose justice ever makes way for His mercy. We have seen the promise of the Redeemer follow immediately on the sentence of condemnation. We have seen this Divine Saviour born in poverty and grow up in labour, to sanctify our wants and our labours. Soon we shall see Him die in the midst of the most cruel sufferings, to expiate the offence of our first father, to conquer death, and to take all bitterness from the last hour of the faithful Christian. The sufferings and death of our Saviour have changed into blessings and means of salvation all the chastisements inflicted on guilty man. Blessings in voluntary poverty and suffering; a blessing in the labour which roots from the earth its brambles and thorns, and

renders it as fertile as before the fall; a blessing in the work of the mind, which seeks what is good, aspires after truth, and devotes itself to the salvation of others; a blessing even in death, which is then but a passage from a laborious and suffering life to a blessed life and eternal rest.

Hence that hope which accompanies all the trials of the faithful Christian, and tempers their bitterness. The trial exists, because, while it is a chastisement, it is also a means of salvation; but hope masters it, and it is perfectly true to say that the faithful soul finds peace and contentment, even in death itself, the most terrible of all our earthly chastisements.

But in order to lay in store for our last hour this peace and this hope, we must labour long, for a good death is the reward of a holy life; it is the last page of the same book. Compare for a moment in your mind the life of a Christian and that of a sinner. The one has had for his law the word of God alone, and heaven for his sole aim; he has suffered patiently for the love and after the example of his Saviour; he has looked on life in this

world only as a toilsome journey to a better life. When death comes he hails and blesses it; for though it is the last hour of his mortal life, it is the dawn of the day that will never end. Jesus, his sweet Saviour, is at his bedside, and supports and consoles him in his last moments. Filled with humble trust in the goodness of God, he sees heaven before him, and regrets not the earth. What is there more beautiful and more desirable than such a death? Does it not in all ways resemble that of the blessed St. Joseph, and does not holy Scripture justly tell us in its own magnificent language: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints—*Pretiosa in conspectu Domini mors sanctorum ejus.*"* And then look at the sinner. Pride and selfishness have been his only law. He has sought only his own pleasure; he has loved himself alone. He has willingly shut his eyes to the distant hopes of heaven, and has confined all his happiness and all his hopes to earth. He has dismissed the thought of death, as he would

* Ps. cxv. 15.

a bad dream. Poor wretch ! his life is past like a season, like a day, and behold death comes to him in its terrible reality. What fear, what despair, seizes him ! To him it is the end of all he has loved, the beginning of a fearful eternity.

God forbid that this hour should come upon any of us while we think not of it. God forbid that we should then bear the burden of a guilty life ! Holy Scripture tells us again : “The death of the wicked is very evil—*Mors peccatorum pessima.*” * The choice lies with ourselves. It depends upon ourselves whether we die without hope, like the wicked, or like St. Joseph in the arms of Jesus and Mary. But, once again, death is the consequence of life ; it follows it as the fruit follows the flower, and the harvest the sowing time. Let us then pray to St. Joseph, that he may obtain for us grace to imitate him in life so that we may be like him in death.

What does the Gospel tell us of the Foster-Father of Jesus ? That he was a just man—*Vir justus.* These two words

* Ps. xxxiii. 22.

contain the whole character of a saint. They show us St. Joseph, such as we have known him in the history of Mary; a descendant of the Kings of Israel, and contented in poverty, filled with a simple and strong faith, his whole soul devoted to the spotless Virgin and the Divine Child, whom it was given to him to guard and protect on earth; brave and constant in suffering, danger, and exile; patient and untiring in labour. What man is there who cannot imitate the life of St. Joseph, according to the strength given him, and be, like him, a just man, that is to say, true, loyal, and religious in all things, like him, animated with a courageous Faith, loving Jesus and Mary, loving his family and his home, which for every Christian father represents the Holy Family and the house of Nazareth, labouring like St. Joseph, without discontent or repining? There is nothing here that all cannot do, and since we can all imitate the life of the holy patriarch we may all hope for his death.

Let us then prepare for death every day of our lives. Let us make use of this salutary thought to judge ourselves, and

let us measure all our actions by this strict rule. No error will be possible, if we sincerely ask ourselves this question: At the hour of death, will the remembrance of this action be for me a subject of hope or of fear? Will this make us more anxious or more sad? Why should it? Shall we not, on the contrary, be happier when our conscience tells us that we have begun to lay up that treasure which in the last day will be our only riches? We are always more afraid of that which we will not look in the face. If we calmly consider death, if we shed on this terrible phantom the true light of Christian hope, all its terrors will vanish, and we shall see only heaven. I once read these words on a tombstone: "In order to find life in death, he lived as one who must die." Blessed is the Christian who has left such a memorial! Let us remember these words; they may guide us to a happy end.

Neither let us forget the duties towards our parents, neighbours, and friends, that this stern and salutary thought imposes upon us. Alas! before we ourselves die, we taste many times the bitterness of

death, by seeing those whom we have most loved disappear from amongst us. May our own grief never make us neglect the most sacred duty that our tenderness can perform towards them. May our devoted care soothe their sufferings, but, above all, may our Faith and our brave affection call early to their bedside the priest, who consoles them in the name of God, and soothes them better than we can, by easing their conscience of the burden of sin. There must be in this hour neither weakness nor cowardly conduct. If the sick man is a good Catholic, he will receive the priest with joy, as if Jesus Himself visited his bedside. If he is not, all the more reason for warning him early, and giving him all the time that he has still to live, to prepare himself to appear before God. And let us remember that this duty is imposed upon every Christian who sees in peril the soul of his brother in Jesus Christ. If no one around the dying man has dared to speak, or has understood the danger, it is the duty of the friend or of the neighbour to interfere, to spare him the most terrible of miseries, an unpre-

pared death. Let us be faithful to this duty, if we desire ourselves one day to find friends with courage to perform it.

Delay in sending for a priest exposes the sick to die without the sacraments, or to receive them ill, because the priest has not time to excite in their hearts the dispositions of faith, contrition, and purpose of amendment, without which the sacraments do not remit sin.

Besides, whence comes this absurd custom of waiting until there is danger before calling the priest to the bedside of the sick man? Is he not the friend of every family? Is he not mixed up with every joy as well as every sorrow, when he baptizes and instructs the little children, blesses the marriages, and prays over the graves of our departed? Is he not the representative of God, who consoles and heals? Then why not call him for ourselves and for our neighbours, at the beginning of illness? Has he not kind words to inspire courage? And if we have on our conscience the remembrance of any sins, shall we not be relieved and calmed when we have thrown off the burden at the feet of this kind friend, who

pardons in God's name? Our gracious Saviour when on earth said: "They that are well have no need of a physician, but they that are sick—*Non necesse habent sani medico, sed qui mali habent.*"* Let us then without delay call to our sick bed Him who came into this world "to heal all manner of sickness and every infirmity—*savans omnem languorem et omnem infirmitatem.*"† Let us recognize the minister whom He in His goodness sends us, and if it is salutary for us in the labours and toils of life to have recourse to the sacraments which His infinite love has instituted to strengthen and console us, how much more evident is the necessity in the hour of the last combat and of the last suffering!

If that hour is not yet come, if it is not God's will that the sick man should die, we know that the sacrament of Extreme Unction, instituted to strengthen the soul of the dying Christian, has power also to heal his body, and restore him to life. Have we not ourselves many times seen the illness cease and the cure begin on

* S. Mark ii. 17.

† S. Matt. iv. 23.

the day on which our gracious God had deigned to visit His suffering servant, and strengthen him with His adorable sacraments? Peace of soul and calm confidence in God are great remedies even in bodily illness. Let our faith and submission be complete, and let us be sure that the help will be proportionate to the necessity of the moment, be it what it may. Let us say to our sweet Saviour what the sisters of Lazarus said of old, "Lord, behold he whom Thou lovest is sick." Let us call Him for our parents and for our friends, as we are firmly resolved to call Him for ourselves. And this sweet Jesus will come, full of pity and tenderness. If the hour of deliverance is come, He will support His servant in his agony, and will open heaven to him. If he has not yet finished his pilgrimage on earth, He will shorten his sufferings, accept his merits, and strengthen him for life, as He would have strengthened him for death.

And then, after having faithfully accomplished our duties towards the dying, let us not forget our duties towards those who are no more. While weeping over

them on earth, we too often forget that their immortal soul is living in another world, whither our tenderness and our charity can follow them, and where our prayers are able greatly to shorten their sufferings. Alas, there are very few souls pure enough to enter immediately from this world into the kingdom of God ; the sufferings of purgatory must complete the expiation of their sins. It is of Faith that the prayers and good works of the faithful on earth are able to shorten these sufferings. And this doctrine, which shows us the Church militant on earth, and the Church triumphant in heaven, united by charity beyond the grave, is one of the most wonderful parts of our Faith. Let us then pray for those whom we have loved. Let us consider that our prayer is to them an alms ; while they were living, should we have wished to see them in distress ? Should we not have worked for them, and sat up to nurse them ? Why, then, forget them because we see them no more ? Do we not know their wants as well as if we had them under our eye ? Let us pray for those who have gone before us in life, for

our parents, who brought us up, and supported us in the sweat of their brow. What should we say of the son who refused bread to his father? We should justly regard him with horror. Are there not children who forget to pray for their departed parents? And yet prayer, which delivers the soul, is more useful than bread, which feeds the body.

Let us then pray for our parents, for our brethren, for all the souls suffering in purgatory. Let us pray, not on one day only, but all our lives. What a happiness would it be if our prayers could deliver one single soul from purgatory! What a friend, what a protector, should we have in heaven!

Prayer.

O Blessed Virgin Mary, who didst weep over the holy companion of thy toils, who didst console him on his bed of suffering, and who wert his benediction in the hour of death, as during his life, teach us the secret of that true tenderness which brings to the dying Christian all the con-

solutions, all the helps, and all the hopes, which our holy religion has in store for him, to strengthen him against the terrors of this last passage. Teach us to repress the outbreaks of our private grief as a secondary matter, and to think only of the salvation of those souls who are about to see their Judge, and to labour for it till the end! And when they have left us alone and weeping upon the earth, O Mary, patroness of true and salutary sorrows, obtain for us that ours may not spend itself in fruitless tears, that it may flow into the bosom of God through prayer, that it may daily implore His mercy for those dear souls who are living far from us, and who are perhaps looking to our faithful prayers for their deliverance from sufferings more severe than we can understand. And when our hour comes, O holy Joseph, patron of a good death, pray for us in remembrance of thy death. Obtain for us the grace to die like thee, resting on the Hearts of Jesus and of Mary. In their name implore pardon for a life which but too little resembles thine. May we, through the help of thy holy intercession, make a holy end of the

days of our pilgrimage on earth, so that we may be reunited in heaven to all those whom we have loved. Amen.

Practice.

Often to invoke St. Joseph for ourselves and for others, as the patron of a good death.

TWENTY-FIRST DAY.

BAPTISM OF JESUS CHRIST—JESUS IN THE DESERT—PENANCE.

“Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”—Matt. iii. 2.

Eighteen long years have elapsed since that day on which the Child Jesus, when found in the temple by His Mother, reminded her by an austere word of His divine mission. Eighteen years devoted to the holy duties of the family, given by Jesus to Mary, and almost all to Joseph also, for according to the ancient traditions, the holy patriarch died only a short time before Jesus was to leave the obscurity of Nazareth. Eighteen years, which form a place of rest for the mind of the Christian, between the first and the last of Mary's sorrows. Who can tell the marvellous progress of these two holy souls of Mary and of Joseph in this constant intercourse with God! The Blessed

Virgin Mary, prevented by the grace of God even from her mother's womb, born without stain, grew nevertheless in perfection every day of her life. "Her life," says a pious writer of our own time, "is an endless heavenward ascension."* The immaculate purity of her soul was the gift of God. The ever-increasing virtues which were its ornament were at once the gift of God and the fruit of her own labour. And since the day on which she became the mother of our Saviour, through all the joys and all the sorrows of the Divine Infancy, during the youth of Jesus at Nazareth, the Sun of Justice, still hidden from the rest of the world, shone upon her soul. Joseph basked in His illuminating rays. What a sight for the Angels are these two transfigured souls by the side of the Saviour made man!

"The beauty of the earthly paradise which God had planted with His own hand, and whither He came at the hour of the evening breeze, to converse with His unfallen creatures, was a shadow of

* Father Faber, "Foot of the Cross."

the loveliness of the Holy House during the eighteen years of the Hidden Life. We cannot guess at all the mysteries which were enacted within that celestial cloister. The words were few, yet in eighteen years they were what we in our human way should call countless. The very silence even was a fountain of grace. There were tens of thousands of beautiful actions, each one of which had such infinite worth that it might have redeemed the world. During those eighteen years an immeasurable universe was glorifying God all day and night But the entire creation was as nothing to the Holy House of Nazareth.”* But these days are passed. Jesus and Mary have already wept over the tomb of Joseph. Already the holy Mother has seen in the countenance of her Son a look of Divine compassion which announces to her that she is soon about to lose Him by absence, before she loses Him by death. One day a strange report was spread throughout Nazareth. “A man had appeared in the desert on the banks of the Jordan. His

* Foot of the Cross, chap. v, p. 232.

clothing was of camel hair; round his loins was a band of leather. He eat no bread and drank no wine; he lived on locusts and wild honey. His words were as austere as his life.”* “Do penance,” said he, “for the kingdom of God is at hand.” It is of this man that the Prophet Isaias had spoken, saying, “A voice of one crying in the desert, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight His paths. Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the country about Jordan. And were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.”†

When these rumours reached Mary, brought, perhaps by those holy women whom the Gospel calls her sisters, Mary the wife of Cleophas and the other Mary, her kinswomen and neighbours at Nazareth, she understood that the hour was come. The austere preacher of the desert was that child whom she had blessed on his entrance into life, the son of Elizabeth and Zachary, the forerunner of her Son.

The Lord, whose ways he was come to

* *Life of Jesus Christ*, by M. Foisset, p. 3.

† St. Matt. iii. 2-6.

prepare, was Jesus. The kingdom of God, which he announced, was that Christian society which the Saviour was come to found by His teaching and by His Blood, over which He was to reign for ever from the highest heaven. At one glance Mary saw all. The sword of Simeon pierced even to the depths of her soul, and the grief so long expected flooded her in its terrible reality.

But the valiant woman, who was to stand at the foot of the cross, the Mother, initiated into the secrets of God, and whose sacrifice was to be united with that of her Son, to save us, kept down the rising waves of a sorrow until then unknown on the earth, and preserving her peace by her complete conformity to the will of God, she awaited her Son at the close of one of His days of labour.

Who shall describe their parting? It is one of those mysteries which the eye of man is not worthy to penetrate. Jesus departed, and our holy Mother found herself alone in that holy house of Nazareth, from which the sun had vanished. "Then," says the holy Gospel, "cometh Jesus from Galilee to the Jordan, unto

John, to be baptized by him. But John stayed Him, saying, I ought to be baptized by Thee, and comest Thou to me? And Jesus, answering, said to him: Suffer it to be so now. For so it becometh us to fulfil all justice. Then he suffered Him. And Jesus being baptized, forthwith came out of the water; and lo! the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him. And behold, a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* In comparing these two passages of the Gospel we are inclined to suppose that the crowd gathered together on the banks of the Jordan listened with docility to this voice from heaven which made known to the earth its Saviour. Doubt was no longer possible. The Lord had Himself spoken. He had borne witness to His Son, and thus confirmed the words of John the Baptist: "I indeed baptize you with water, but there shall come one mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to loose; He shall

* St. Matt. iii.

baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.”* But the Gospel tells us nothing of what the multitude believed or understood. If they saw the white dove, perhaps they attributed its appearance to chance. If they heard the heavenly voice, perchance they said it thundered, as on the eve of the Passion, when the same voice spoke to Jesus: “The multitude, therefore, that stood and heard, said that it thundered; others said an angel spoke to Him.”† Throughout the whole course of our Saviour’s life we never see more than a certain small number of pure souls who learn the lessons contained in the miracles by which God made known His Christ. This unhappy people had eyes and saw not, ears and heard not, and moreover there were among that multitude gathered on the banks of the Jordan some whose pride of heart and self-esteem were a source of darkness to themselves and others. Such were the Pharisees in the Gospel, to whom John had spoken these severe words: “Ye brood of vipers, who hath shewed you to flee from the

* St. Luke iii.

† St. John xii. 29.

wrath to come? Bring forth fruit worthy of penance. And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham for our father, for I tell you that God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham. For now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree, therefore, that doth not yield good fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire." And, speaking of the Divine Being whose forerunner he was, he added: "Whose fan is in His Hand, and He will thoroughly cleanse His floor, and gather His wheat into the barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire."*

These proud men, whom John was calling to do penance, heard him and hardened their hearts. They saw Jesus and knew Him not. But He, the Holy One above all others, not only does He bow His Head to a baptism which was a mere symbol of penance, but filled with the Holy Ghost, Who rested visibly upon Him, He plunged into the deserts which stretch on the other side of the Jordan. There, alone with His Father, He pre-

* St. Matt. iii.

pared Himself by sublime communings for His earthly mission ; He prepared Himself for it by praying humbly, like the least of us ; He prepared Himself by austerities which we care not to impose upon ourselves, guilty though we be ; He fasted, the holy Gospel tells us, for forty days and forty nights.

Strange words are these ! Jesus prays, Jesus does penance ! Yes, Jesus prays, because He is man as well as God, and because, in relation to His Father, He gives us the example of the most perfect love, of the deepest reverence, and of obedience unto death, even the death of the cross. Jesus does penance because He Who on earth, as in heaven, is holiness itself, He who took our human nature entire, excepting sin, has nevertheless such love for sinful men that He has consented to make Himself the expiatory Victim of their iniquities. All the sins of this world, past and to come, weighed upon His innocent Head.

To become a voluntary sacrifice for another is the height of self-devotion and self-sacrifice. If a father exposes himself to death to save his son, a brother to save

his brother, how we admire that power of love, which forgets itself, and will save at any price. If a soldier exposes himself for his brother in arms, or a brave officer for his soldiers, how we honour these noble victims of self-devotion ! What shall we then say of those sacrifices which bring no glory, by which an innocent man suffers himself to be accused for a guilty one, and accepts dishonour, and perhaps death, to save him whom he prefers before honour and before life ! How we should pity him, how we should hate the cause of his sacrifice, above all, if the voluntary victim were a being high and pure, whose virtues throw into relief the iniquity which he takes to himself, and whose loyal heart must bitterly feel the dishonour that he imposes on himself ! And yet this would be but a man sacrificing himself for a fellow man ; he suffers the offence of another to be laid upon him ; but no human creature is free from fault, and thus, in expiating the sin of another, he would be expiating his own. But in this case see who is the Victim : Jesus Christ, the Holy of Holies !

Look at the heavens : each star that we

see there is a world larger than our own; and if to us they seem to be only brilliant points in space, it is because they are millions of miles from the earth. Now these millions of miles are nothing in comparison to the infinite distance that exists between the essence of holiness and the very least of our sins.

Look at fire and water; they cannot exist together. If we mix them, the one extinguishes the other, and at the same time is itself dried up, and nothing remains but smoke and cinders. The love of Jesus has done what we cannot do. Water and fire have less horror of one another than has holiness of sin, and yet holiness itself has stooped to our iniquity; He has taken its burden upon Himself, and has done penance for it. We, who have honest hearts, can feel how we should resent it, were we accused of a wicked action that we had not committed. Let us measure, if we are able, the sufferings of our Saviour, laden with all the sins of the world.

Let us learn to weep over the penance of Jesus Christ; let us learn to understand it. To do penance is to suffer; to

do penance for another is to suffer for another. Does not a mother suffer for her guilty child, when, bent to the earth by the weight of his sin, she feels it at all hours consuming her soul like the pangs of remorse? She does penance for him every day of her life, and asks God to chastise her, provided only he repents. Does not the hard-working father suffer for his family when he labours in the heat of the sun, or in the cold of winter, to gain the livelihood of those who are too weak to work for themselves? Do not they suffer for their country, who see it in danger, or humiliated by a succession of sins, accumulated from age to age, and of which they are innocent? Jesus has done for us more severe penance than the mother who offers herself for her child; Jesus has toiled more to gain our life than the most hard-working father. Jesus has borne the sins of all ages and all countries. He has suffered more than all earthly victims of self-devotion and love. Shall He then have suffered in vain? Shall we refuse to let ourselves be saved by His tears? Shall we not offer Him our penance in return for His? And

after having been in spirit to that desert where He begins for us the expiation which is to end on Calvary, is there a single human being so proud and so ungrateful as to dare to say: I am righteous; I am innocent; leave penance to sinners, I have no need of it?

Alas! have we not sometimes heard such foolish and wicked speeches? I am honest, I have done nobody any harm, why then should I repent? I will not go to confession; I should have nothing to say. Have we never heard words such as these? If ever we hear them, and if, which God forbid, there should be one amongst us so unhappy as to utter them, let us think of our Saviour, kneeling at the feet of St. John the Baptist, receiving from the hands of a man the sign of penance, and retiring to the desert, to weep for forty days and forty nights over our sins, for which we weep not!

Let us, then, who know the good of penance, and the sweetness of its severities, use all possible efforts to make them known to our brethren. It is well worth the trouble. It is the price of the salvation of their souls, and a great saint used

to say, that to save a single soul he would go to the end of the world, or would willingly die. And let those who dare to call themselves too righteous to do penance remember, that the truly righteous man does not deceive himself as to any, even the least, of his faults, because he is humble and clear-sighted, and that the wicked man, on the contrary, multiplies his often very serious sins without even seeing them, because his pride blinds him.

Who has ever taught us that all the duties of man, consist simply in being neither a highway robber, or one of those wretches against whom human justice arms itself? Let those who think so open the catechism of one of their little children; this is one of the first questions that the Church asks him: "Who made you?" and the child replies, "God." "Why has God made you?" and the child replies, "To know Him, love Him, and serve Him in this world, and be happy with Him for ever in the next." "Who made you?" "God." Then you belong body and soul to God, as the bread we have made, the tool we have fashioned, and the fruit we have planted and culti-

vated in our gardens, belong to us. We belong to Him still more, for we could not have made this bread if God had not caused the wheat to grow ; we could not have made this tool, if God had not hardened for years the wood that forms it, and for centuries the iron of which the knife is made : and is not this fruit filled with the wonders of God, Who placed the shoot in the seed, and the fruit in the flower ? In everything we make, the first part belongs always to God. We only appropriate to our own use, by the intelligence that He has given us, the things that He created for us. But who created us, and sent us into the world ? who drew us from nothing, to which we should return, if He did not continually preserve us ? None but God. We belong, then, to Him a thousand times more than any thing on the earth can belong to us. And what did He create us for ? To know Him, love Him, and serve Him. Have we known Him, loved Him, and served Him ? Has He been the only aim of our actions ? Has His holy law been our rule and our constant occupation ? We may have passed days, weeks, perhaps

years, without thinking of Him. And yet we say that we have no need of repentance! We have failed in that which is the very object of our existence, and we do not go to confession because we should have nothing to say!

Let us beware of the justice of the Pharisees in the Gospel. Thank God, amongst Catholics there are but few so careless as not still to go to church on feast days, as their fathers went before them. But let us take heed not to content ourselves too easily with external goodness. Let us dig deep and find out the evil, and cut it off at the root. Above all, let us never say, I do nobody any harm, so I have no need of repentance. Let us again turn to one of the wonderful Gospel narratives. "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, the other a publican. The Pharisee, standing, prayed thus within himself: O God, I give Thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, as also is this publican. I fast twice in a week; I give tithes of all I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes

towards heaven, but struck his breast, saying : O God, be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down into his house justified rather than the other, because every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”*

We see here the difference between pride in false virtue, and true penitence. The publicans, or tax-gatherers, were much despised by the Jews, because they were the instruments of the Roman power, and often abused their charge, and troubled the people by their usury. The Pharisees, on the contrary, were rigid observers of the law ; but they practised it in the letter rather than in the spirit, and their hearts were full of pride. Here, then, the publican represents the penitent sinner, and the Pharisee the false man hardening himself in an imaginary righteousness. Let us, then, take the humble publican for our model. If, happily, we have sinned less than some others, let us remember that it is through the grace of God, and, moreover, that that grace is

* St. Luke xviii. 13.

sufficient to render us a thousand times better than we are. If His merciful Hand ceased to support us, alas ! whither should we fall ? Let us, then, repent for the evil that we have done, and for the good that we have left undone. Let us pray for sinners, and, above all, let us never despise them. One single ray of divine grace can make a great saint of that sinner whom we, in our pride, consider so much beneath ourselves. This is what St. John the Baptist meant when he said to the Pharisees : “ And think not to say within yourselves : We have Abraham for our father ; for I tell you that God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham.”

Lastly, let us accept with gratitude, and employ with Faith, those times in the year that the Church specially marks out for penance. If she, in her wisdom, had not marked them out, how many Christians would never have thought of reserving for themselves during life, those moments of recollection and silence, when the voice of the world is stopped, and when they look backward to weep over their sins, and forward to foresee dangers,

and to arm themselves with strong resolutions; and when they chastise with salutary severity this wretched body, which is the prison of our soul and the cause of many of its offences. In reading the lives of the Saints, or the history of the primitive Church, we are sometimes frightened at the penances imposed on themselves by our fathers in the Faith. We are astonished to find that a sin, confessed and sincerely acknowledged, had to be wept over for months, sometimes for years, and that the penitent, separated from the society of the faithful, kneeling at the church door, poorly clothed, and his head covered with ashes, passed long days in fasting and tears. The Church is less severe now, because her children unhappily have not courage for such penances. Like an indulgent mother, she knows their weakness, and holds out her arms towards them. But let us remember, that what we weep not here below, we shall weep for elsewhere. I am not speaking of those unhappy ones alone, who neither accuse themselves, nor repent of their sins, and for whom hell is half open. I am speaking of good Christians, who go regularly

to confession, who repent sincerely of their sins, who intend to avoid them for the future, and who fulfil the penance imposed on them by the priest, but who do not apply themselves as they ought to the expiation of their sins, by proportionate satisfaction. Doubtless such as these are in the love of our Lord, and we hope that they may persevere; but God is just, and He demands that, before entering His kingdom, we should pay the debts contracted towards His justice. If confession and absolution have freed us from the eternal punishment due to sin, the temporal punishment remains, by which we must satisfy the justice of God, as far as we are able. It is of faith, that if we have not paid this debt during life, we shall pay it after death, in that terrible passage from earth to heaven called purgatory; and if it is true that in this world the honest man finds it to his advantage, as well as to his honour, to pay his debts as soon as possible, and not to let accumulate from year to year, interest which in the end would double the original sum, how much more true is it when it concerns that which we owe to God!

In this world satisfaction is easy ; the mercy of God accepts all our efforts, and follows us to the last hour of our life, but beyond that, His justice reassumes its rights, and the Holy Scripture, filled with the marvels of God's love for men, tells us, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Let us, then, pay our debts while there is time. If we could for an instant see the sufferings of purgatory, with what ardour should we embrace, here below, the penance that alone can save us from them ! Are we ever sure of having satisfied the justice of God ? Does not the least offence against the God to whom we owe everything deserve years of penance ? Let us accept with gratitude the easy penances that the Church imposes upon us ; let us understand the usefulness of the days of fasting and prayer, on the eve of great feasts, to prepare us to receive their graces holily ; at the beginning of the four seasons, to draw down the blessing of heaven on the different portions of the year, and on the seeds that our labour has confided to the earth ; and during Lent, the forty days of which precede the great

feast of Easter, in memory of the forty days that Jesus spent in the desert, before beginning to preach the Gospel. As to the poor, when they fast they have to change their usual life but little, and the Church, who loves them as Jesus loved them, considering their hard labour, is lenient as to the hours and nature of their meals. But, during these holy days, they should courageously cut off every unnecessary indulgence. For example, it would be well that on a Sunday in Lent or Advent they should never be seen going to the public house, which, after all, is little the place for a good father of a family. And they should accept with renewed courage their daily labours, toils, and privations. All these, offered to our dear Lord, and borne with patience, will serve greatly to expiate their sins. They should mortify themselves in their speech, repressing every expression of anger or bitterness, and, above all, they should carefully avoid all profane words and swearing. God hears them. They should never let blasphemy come from their lips, not only in Lent, but at any time. Everything that we sacrifice to God will

be a good penance, and it will be accepted and blessed more than we think.

Who will help us to bring forth worthy fruits of penance? The Mother, who, whilst Jesus was fasting and praying for us in the desert of the Jordan, was praying and weeping for us in another desert; in the house of Nazareth, in which Jesus no longer dwelt. The soul of Mary was so closely united to the soul of Jesus, God had given her so real a share in the work of our redemption, that it cannot be doubted that she followed His penance and His prayer from afar, and united herself to Him to obtain for us the mercy of God. We know that Mary is the refuge of sinners, the help of penitent souls, and the Mother of Mercy. Let us, then, pray to her, let us pray to her from the bottom of our hearts, that she may obtain for us the grace of true repentance, and that we may be with the good seed, when, in the day of judgment, the Lord cleanses His threshing floor, and gathers the wheat into His barn, and burns the chaff in unquenchable fire. Let us call upon her to-night, in that beautiful prayer of St.

Bernard, the efficacy of which has been proved by so many miracles.

Memorare.

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that any one who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession, was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of Virgins, my Mother, to thee I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen.

Practice.

To meditate often on these words : " Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

TWENTY-SECOND DAY.

JESUS IN THE DESERT—THE TEMPTATION.

“ Our Father.....lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”—
St. Matt. vi. 13.

Yesterday we considered the wonderful mystery of an Almighty God humbling Himself before a man ; of a God who is holiness itself submitting to the rigours of penance. To-day our wonder will be increased, for we shall see this same God submitting to the greatest of our sufferings, namely, temptation. “Then Jesus,” says the holy Gospel, “was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards He was hungry. And the tempter, coming, said to Him : If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. And He answered, and said : It is written, *Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the*

mouth of God. Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, and set Him upon the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him: If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down; for it is written, that He hath given His angels charge over Thee, and in their hands shall they bear Thee up, lest, perhaps, Thou dash Thy foot against a stone. Jesus said to him: It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil took Him up into a very high mountain, and shewed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, and said to Him: All these will I give Thee, if, falling down, Thou wilt adore me. Then Jesus saith to him: Begone, Satan, for it is written: The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil left Him, and Angels came and ministered to Him.”*

Who, then, is this evil one, who thus dares to attack the Incarnate Son of God, Him Whom the Angels acknowledge as their Master, and Whom they vie with one another in serving? We know him

* St. Matt. iv.

but too well, he is our ancient enemy ; he is truly as he is called the evil one !

“ When God created the pure spirits,” says the great Bishop Bossuet, “ He gave them as large a share in His power as in His intelligence. And, though creating them subject to Himself, it was His will that the inferior nature of man should be subject to them. Thus God in His wisdom had created beings superior to men, who were to be the ministers of His will, the bearers of His messages, and of His commandments. And, to maintain the universe in the wonderful order in which He had created it, He gave to the Angels, subject to His own almighty will, a certain power over material nature. But God, who has given liberty to all creatures, that they may have the merit of free obedience, met with ingratitude and rebellion amongst these pure spirits. Some of those whom His wisdom had raised so high, wished in their pride to rise still higher, and to make themselves equal to Him who had brought them out of nothing. We know the history of their shameful fall ; we know that the bright archangel, who was called before his fall

Lucifer, the bearer of light, now buried into the depths of hell with the companions of his sin, far from God, in the fury of despair, is become our eternal enemy, Satan, the evil one !”

Bossuet tells us farther, that God “left to the rebel angels, for their punishment, the wonderful gifts with which He had enriched them for their happiness and ours. Their crime has disfigured all, and God, in His justice, has changed all their graces into evil ; their natural nobility is changed into pride, their intelligence into cunning and artifice, their will into injustice and jealousy ; they are become proud, false, and envious, and are reduced by their misery to the wretched and dark occupation of tempting men, for there now remains to them, instead of the happiness which they enjoyed in the beginning, only the gloomy and malicious pleasure which the guilty find in making accomplices, and the wretched in giving themselves companions in disgrace.”*

God, whose will it was to give men, as well as the faithful angels, the merit of

* Bossuet, *Elev. sur les Myst* : V. Elevation, 23rd semaine.

free obedience, allowed Satan to tempt our first parents. We know the sad history of the first temptation. The wicked one, to deceive them, used the means which had caused his own fall. "You shall be as gods," he said, and Eve yielded, and Adam yielded with her.

Since that time a fatal inclination to evil, the consequence and punishment of our fall, has doubled the power of the fallen angel over our souls; we can only be delivered by one more powerful than he, by our dear Saviour, through His merits and His truth. He said to those Jews who believed in Him: "If you continue in My word, you shall be My disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*

But if we increase by sin the power which the accursed one has over us, then, alas! we shall become, according to the awful words of our Saviour, the children of the devil, and we shall do the desires of our father.† May God preserve us from such misery!

But let us return to the desert, where

* St. John viii. 31, 32.

† St. John viii. 44.

the work of our salvation was begun. Whilst the wild beasts kept aloof from the Incarnate God, or crouched with reverence at His feet, Satan prowled about these dry places like a lion seeking his prey. By the terror with which he was filled, in spite of himself, he felt that this Solitary, wrapped in prayer, in no way resembled his ordinary victims, and that in Him there was nothing akin to evil. He knew that the time was accomplished, and that the promised Deliverer was soon to come into the world. But he also knew that the contest was to be rude, and that before becoming a conqueror, the Saviour of the world was to be a victim. Could this mysterious Being be the Saviour who had been expected for so many years? Satan wished to know, but he did not dare approach, for fasting and prayer are a powerful defence against him. But when Jesus had finished praying, when, according to the words of the Gospel, He was hungry, and human weakness shewed itself, the tempter came and said to Him: "If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread."

Never once do we find in the whole course of the life of our Saviour, that He worked a miracle to save Himself a suffering or a trouble. He bore human necessities as a burden which He had sought of His own will. The human nature suffered; but the Divine nature commanded suffering, and refused to alleviate it. Let us listen to His answer to the tempter, and let us seek the lesson which He teaches us. "It is written: Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God." Let us well understand that the first temptation which the devil offers to the Christian at his entrance into life, as well as to our Saviour at the beginning of His public ministry, is the rebellion of the body against the spirit. Happy is the man who answers as our Lord did: "not in bread alone doth man live." He is not created to find all his pleasure in the tastes and satisfactions of this perishable body. His true food is the word of God, which elevates and strengthens his soul, the holy law to which all ought to yield obedience.

The devil, thus defeated, had recourse

to still stronger weapons. "If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down from the pinnacle of the temple; for it is written, that He hath given His angels charge over Thee, and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest, perhaps, Thou dash Thy foot against a stone." What is this temptation, if not presumption, which makes us fall head foremost into occasions of sin, with such confidence in our own strength that we cannot even suppose it possible that we should fall? These occasions are a real precipice from which, like madmen, we throw ourselves down, "with a rash hope of some extraordinary and miraculous help. This is what happens to all sinners, when they despise those precautions which would make them avoid the dangers under which they have so often given way. This is a most daring tempting of God."*

"Jesus said to him: It is written again: Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Satan, in fury at this second defeat, and trembling more and more as he became convinced that Jesus was the expected

* Bossuet, Elevations sur les Mysteres.

Messias, tried the last and most terrible of his temptations, pride. He shewed Him from a high mountain all the kingdoms of the world, and all the glory of them, and he dared to say to Him, "All these will I give Thee, if, falling dow, Thou wilt adore me."

Have not we, miserable though we be, felt this temptation within us? The devil so excites our pride that we see all worldly goods before us as if from a high mountain. To our eyes nothing appears better than ourselves; if God has not placed us in the first ranks, we consider it a kind of injustice done to us. Why should this or that person be placed above us? Are we not of more worth than he? We do not ask through what trouble and labour he or his fathers have reached that position, nor whether God had some end in placing him in it, nor whether this end is fulfilled. All we know is that we ought to be in his place, for Satan has brought us on to the mountain of pride, and we can see nothing above ourselves. Then the devil begins to speak, and say, "All these things, which thou covetest, shall be thine: nothing is easier, only serve me,

and I will give them to thee. Abandon all these obsolete laws, which thy fathers observed; abandon the God who shewed Himself in poverty and patience. I am honour, wealth, conquest, and vengeance. I will give thee all." Liar that he is, he well knows that he can give us nothing; but he is ever seeking to deceive us. Whilst we are praying to God in our peaceful land, whole countries are being devastated through the instigation of the evil one, and God knows how much blood has been shed, and how many tears have been caused by his worshippers, for, according to the words of Scripture, "he was a murderer from the beginning, and he stood not in the truth, because truth is not in him. When he speaketh a lie he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar, and the father thereof."* Let us therefore answer him boldly with our Lord, "Begone, Satan, for it is written: The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve."† Then the devil will leave us, and angels will come to us. They will not minister to us as to Jesus

* St. John viii. 44.

† St. Matt. iv. 10.

their Sovereign Master, but they will bear us in their arms, and will keep us in the path of life, lest, perhaps, we dash our foot against the stone of sin. And as our Divine Lord came forth from the desert a conqueror, to begin His public life in this world, so we, when we have conquered the three great temptations of sensuality, presumption, and pride, shall enter truly into a Christian life, and shall serve God like free and faithful servants. Let us not, however, flatter ourselves that we have obtained a permanent victory, for the Evangelist St. Luke tells us that, after having tempted Jesus in all these ways, "the devil departed from Him for a time." Now if we can believe from these words that the devil dared to begin again this hopeless strife against our Saviour, only to harass Him, what will prevent his coming to us, who are so weak, and who bear the mark of the wound he gave our first parents, and whom he hopes to strike again in the same place, if we separate ourselves an instant from our Saviour, Who has cured, and Who protects us? "Be sober and watch," says the Apostle St. Peter, "because your adversary the

devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour." The Apostle addresses this warning to us all; this roaring lion is always present, watching the favourable moment to surprise us. We leave our dwellings without thinking of him; woe be to us if a heartfelt prayer said at waking does not drive him away, for he is present. Yesterday, perhaps, we did some good action, and there is our enemy, poisoning the recollection, and tarnishing the merit, by exciting thoughts of pride. Or we have done some evil, and the repose of the night has calmed us; grace speaks, and repentance begins. Then comes the enemy, and shuts our hearts to the inspirations of God, which tell us to go and humbly confess our fault. We meet a friend or neighbour poorer than ourselves; charity moves us towards him, an affectionate word is on our lips, who is it then that holds back our hands, and checks this good impulse, which was just about to be converted into a good action? Who is it that transforms charity into hardness of heart, and changes into an excessive love of the money we have

saved, the gratitude we owe to God who has blessed our labour ?

If we are poor, we can, by accepting our holy privations, resemble our Saviour, and obtain heaven. Who, then, is it that can make the poorest amongst us avaricious by giving him the desire of goods which he has not ? And who, from this avaricious desire of riches, or of happiness, can produce a feeling of jealous hatred against those who possess them, or of envy, that poison which ceaselessly torments the poor soul which admits it ? When we find ourselves alone in the fields and woods, let us think of God, Who sees us, and Who is our companion and defender, in solitude as elsewhere. For the enemy is there ; he will show us our neighbour's possession, which we envy ; he says to us, You are alone, take it ; who will be the wiser ? Why is it his, and not yours ? Or he will try us by shameful temptations, and will surprise us by dangerous occasions. Let us watch ; let us drive away the enemy ; and beware lest we have to answer for our own loss, and for that of another soul, which will cry against us at the day of judgment. The

tempter will come in the hour of rest, and on holidays, and, leading the father from his home, and his lawful recreation, he will make him eat and drink like a mere animal, whilst the children have only dry bread at home. And as he has degraded his innocent joy, which is so pleasing to God, into license, so will he change his noble intelligence into something so hideous and degraded that could he see himself in this state, he would blush for shame. Then comes the devil of anger; and with him uproar, oaths, and blows; and in the madness of rage and wine, knives are drawn, and between an honest man and a murderer there is only the chance of a blow more or less well directed. This chance is Providence, Who has pity on man, and spares him the remorse of the morrow. God alone protects us from all these temptations, and from the fatal sins which follow them. The catechism calls them the deadly sins, because they are the root and beginning of all other sins; but perhaps we have never reflected that they are daily in our path, that pride, covetousness, envy, lust, gluttony, and anger, are the weapons of

which our spiritual enemy makes use to wound us, and at the same time the seductions which he, the father of lies, uses to blind us.

What, then, is to be done? We must be sober and watch. We must have our arms always ready, like good soldiers, to drive away the enemy with shame. We must also be good servants, ever occupied with the work of God our Master. This work of God is, first of all, our own salvation; and our daily duties, and the labour by which we gain bread for our families, are part of this work of God, and are the best means of driving away the enemy. The last of the deadly sins is, perhaps, that which gives the greatest advantage to the devil; it is sloth, which refuses all work, which leads us to lay aside all our duties to God, and the most necessary duties of our state of life. Sloth, which reduces our souls to the state of a besieged town, the garrison of which is asleep, and all the gates wide open. Then the enemy enters, with all his train, without striking a blow. The slothful man is sometimes called a coward, and justly so, because he who has not the

courage to work for his soul, by fulfilling his religious duties, or for his body, by supporting his family, has not the courage to resist temptation, and becomes capable of all evil, because he has been incapable of all good. Let us take courage then, Is not heaven well worth labouring to gain? It is related that the Jews, having returned from the captivity of Babylon, and desiring to rebuild the walls of the holy city, worked with the trowel in one hand, and in the other the sword, to defend themselves from their enemies, who assailed them at all hours, and that Nehemias, their chief, standing in the midst of them directed at once the work and the fight. This is the image of the true Christian; to work and fight from sunrise till sunset, from the age of reason until the hour of death. The enemy will attack us unless he finds us on the watch, valiant, and armed alike for defence and for labour. And if he dares to attack us, let us still take courage; our fear will give him too much advantage over us, and there is no harm in temptation, since Jesus was tempted; but temptation is a danger, and it is then that we should

assemble round Jesus, our chief and our defender, and attach ourselves to Him without delay and without hesitation, and say to the enemy, "Begone, Satan : for it is written, Thou shalt adore the Lord thy God, and Him only thou shalt serve."

Let us, then, never trifle with the evil one. If a thing is forbidden, never ask if the law is too severe, nor whether the thing is agreeable, nor whether others, who are accounted respectable people, do it. The first remedy against temptation is flight, and obedience to God. Let us believe that our pastors are right in all that they forbid us ; if the enemy sees in us any hesitation or regret we are lost. As soon as he speaks, let us say without delay, "Begone, Satan."

Let us never trifle with the evil one. Some country folk have superstitions which are ridiculous and sometimes dangerous. Mortals like ourselves, and subject to the same evils as ourselves, wish to make us believe that they have the power to cast a spell upon us, or upon our cattle, or to protect us from these same evils, which they have power to inflict on us at their pleasure. From whence could they

obtain such a power? They are not saints; and God has only very rarely, and to great saints, given the power of working the miracles which these people pretend to work for a few pieces of money. Now, if the power does not come from God, from whom does it come? If these pretended miracles are not absurd tricks to gain money, they must be the work of the great deceiver, who is never at a loss for means to deceive us, or lead us astray; and the Church, in her wisdom, has forbidden in the severest way the detestable practices of pretended sorcerers; and she has likewise forbidden the weak-minded, who might believe in them, to have recourse to such means of cure. God alone can drive away illness from men or from cattle. The Church does not refuse us her blessing; she does not refuse it even to the humble companions of man's labour. Let us believe in these blessings, and seek them, but no others. Let us never trifle with the evil one.

A charming passage in the great St. Bonaventure relates, that when Satan had retired in shame, and the Angels had surrounded Jesus, prostrating themselves at

His feet, and hailing Him as their God and Sovereign Master, they said to Him, "Lord, what wilt Thou that we present to Thee after so long a fast?" Then Jesus ordered them to go and find His beloved Mother, and to ask her if she had anything for her Son, as no food was so pleasing to Him as that which was prepared by her hands. "Then two angels," says the holy doctor, "went quickly through space, and in a moment were with Mary. They comforted her in her solitude, by speaking to her of Jesus, and the humble food which her maternal hands prepared was taken into the desert to nourish the Lord of the world. Let us, like the Angels, go to Mary. Let us rejoice with her at our Saviour's victory over Satan, a victory which gives to us the hope of overcoming our spiritual enemy. Let us ask her to obtain for us all the graces of which we stand in need, for this contest, which is so continual and so severe. Let us ask her help, for she is the new Eve, who has repaired all the evil which came to us through the first Eve, and who has crushed the head of the serpent, the tempter. Through her prayers, and by

her help, we shall obtain the salvation of our souls, for which especially our dear Saviour hungered in the desert, where He had prayed so much for us. This will be the food which His holy Mother will prepare for Him, and which He will prefer to all earthly food.

Prayer.

Holy Virgin Mary, help of sinners, we will fly to thy powerful protection when the enemy attacks us. He has never found entrance into the unassailable fortress of thy soul. There was no spot in thee which could give him any right over thee. But we, alas! were conceived in sin, and needed to be purified from the original stain in the waters of baptism. Save us, through thy powerful intercession, from whatever weakness the original sin washed away in the Blood of thy Divine Son has left in us. Strengthen us, O victorious Virgin, against the never-dying enemy whom thou hast overthrown. Help us always, like our Divine Model, to oppose to his perfidious suggestions the

word of God. And when we have served God for our appointed time by a courageous and faithful life, help us at the hour of our death, and be for thy children the gate of heaven. Amen.

Practice.

To reject temptation as soon as it comes, without fear or discouragement. If the devil is near to tempt us, God is also near to defend us.

TWENTY-THIRD DAY.

CALLING OF THE FIRST APOSTLES.

“Jesus said to them: Come ye after Me, and I will make you to be fishers of men.....And they forthwith left their nets, and father, and followed Him.”—St. Matt. iv. 19, 22.

“Meanwhile, Jerusalem was moved by the preaching of St. John the Baptist, and the great Council of the Jews, whose business it was to superintend religious matters, sent to him priests to question him on his person and ministry. Those who were chosen were of the sect of the Pharisees. The messengers asked him this question: ‘Who art thou?’ And he confessed that he was not the Christ. The messengers insisted, and said to him: ‘What then, art thou Elias?’ And he said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Art thou the prophet?’* But John answered, ‘No.’

* He whom they called thus, was Jeremias, whom the Jews called the prophet, and who, together with Elias,

Then they said to him : ' Who art thou then ? What answer shall we give to them that sent us ? What sayest thou of thyself ? ' John answered : ' I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the Prophet Isaias.' The messengers asked him again, ' Why then dost thou baptize if thou be not Christ, nor Elias, nor the prophet ? ' John answered : ' I baptize with water, but there hath stood One in the midst of you, whom you know not. The same is He that shall come after me, who is preferred before me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to loose. These things were done in Bathabara,* beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.'†

This place called Bethabara, or house of passage, was celebrated in the history of the Jews. There it was that, after the

was, according to the general opinion, to appear once more amongst them.

* M. Foisset quotes from a different reading. The English Douay version reads " Bethania."

† History of Jesus Christ, by M. Foisset. See St. John i. 21-25.

death of Moses, the people of God, led by Josue, passed the Jordan dryshod, the waters of the river reverently retiring, as the priests who bore the sacred ark descended into it. An altar, built on the shore by Josue's orders, of twelve stones taken out of the bed of the river, and another built in the middle of the river, of twelve stones taken from the shore, marked the place for the reverence of future generations. On this holy spot, on which God had opened the promised land to His people, John had baptized Him who came to open heaven to the new people of God, who are drawn from all nations of the earth. At this same place John paid Him a first and solemn homage.

It was at the time when the vanquished tempter left our Saviour, and when the angels of heaven ministered to Him on the mountain. "Our Lord," says St. Bonaventure, "desiring to return to His Mother, came down from the mountain. Let us follow Him in spirit on this journey, and, seeing Him, the Lord of the world, walk thus barefoot, and without

escort, let us not refuse Him our lively compassion.”*

Our Lord does not allow the angels to bear Him on their wings; it is His will to suffer both the fatigues of the journey and the heat of the day. Next morning He reached the banks of the river, His feet wounded like those of an ordinary traveller. What was the holiness of the ark of the covenant compared to the holiness of that God Himself, Whose power forced the waters of the Jordan to withdraw before it? And yet the mountains did not tremble, the Jordan did not turn back, and amongst the people who surrounded John the Baptist, not one recognised in this traveller, who appeared to them but as an ordinary penitent, their King, who came to them meek and full of love.†

But St. John the Baptist, raising his voice, bore witness, and cried, “Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who taketh away the sin of the world.”‡

Let us carefully consider the testimony

* St. Bonaventure *Meditations sur la Vie de J. C.*

† St. Matt. xxi. 5.

‡ St. John i. 29.

borne by the holy forerunner, for he makes known, says Bossuet, "a deep mystery of Jesus Christ. Day by day, and morning and evening, a lamb was sacrificed in the temple, and this was the unceasing and perpetual sacrifice. This is what made John speak the words we have just read. It may even have been that Jesus drew near at the very hour, well known to all, at which this sacrifice was being offered up. John had said the day before, that the Christ, who was to follow him, had preceded him by His eternal origin; he now made Him known as the victim of the world. Do not imagine that that lamb which is sacrificed morning and evening in a perpetual sacrifice, is the true Lamb, the true Victim of God. Behold Him, who, coming into the world, has taken the place of all other victims. He it is Who is the great Victim of the human race, and Who alone can expiate and remove that great sin which is the beginning of all others, and which for that reason may be called the sin of the world, that is, the sin of Adam, which is that of the universe.....Behold this Lamb of God, Whom Isaias saw in

spirit, when he represented Him as the Lamb Who suffered Himself not only to be shorn, but even, so to speak, to be flayed, and to be sacrificed without complaint, and whom Jeremias saw and represented in his own person when he said: I am as an innocent lamb borne to the sacrifice. Behold this Lamb, so gentle, so simple, so patient, without guile, without deception, Who is to be sacrificed for all sinners."

The multitude listened in wonder to the words of John. "This is He of whom I said: After me there cometh a Man Who is preferred before me; because He was before me. And I knew Him not." For John had passed his youth in the desert, whilst Jesus grew up far from him. "But I come baptizing with water, that He may be made manifest in Israel. I saw the Spirit coming down as a dove from heaven, and He remained upon Him. Once more I knew Him not, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me: He upon Whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, He it is that baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.

I saw and I gave testimony that this is the Son of God.”*

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. And seeing Jesus passing he said to them: Behold the Lamb of God. At these words the two disciples followed Jesus. And Jesus turning, and seeing them following Him, saith to them, “What seek you?” “Master,” said they, “where dwellest Thou?” Jesus said, “Come and see.” They went and saw where He abode, and stayed with Him that day. Jesus was now about to call the first companions of His preaching and of His sufferings, the first of those whom we venerate under the name of Apostles, the first members, and afterwards the first princes of His Church, who, after the example of their Divine Master, laboured and died for our salvation. Let us observe with attention the details of their divine calling. Struck to the heart by the homage rendered to our Saviour by St. John the Baptist their master, and encouraged doubtless by the Forerunner himself to follow this greater

* Vie de Jesus Christ, M. Foisset.—St. Jean. i.

Master, as soon as John said, "*Behold the Lamb of God,*" they followed Jesus in silence. "And when this good Master, who ardently desired their salvation, turned towards them to encourage them, and said to them, 'What seek you?' they humbly asked Him where He dwelt, that they might follow Him. Jesus said to them, 'Come and see.' "*"

And it was doubtless in some wild shelter in the desert that they passed the rest of the day, listening to His word. The next day their faith was great, for Andrew, one of the two, who was a fisher of Bethsaida in Galilee, met Simon his brother and said to him, "We have found the Messias." He brought him to Jesus. And Jesus, looking upon him, said, "Thou art Simon, the son of Jona; thou shalt be called Cephas," which is interpreted Peter. This fisherman, upon whom Jesus at once fixed His eyes, and to whom He gave a new name, is the same to whom He afterwards said, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not

* St. Bonaventure, sur la Vie de Jesus Christ.

prevail against it.”* He is the first Head, the first Pope of the infant Church ; it is his successor whom we venerate at the present time as the head of that holy Church, ancient in years but young in ever-renewed vigour, of that Church against which the gates of hell, that is to say, evil, have not prevailed for centuries, in spite of so many attacks, and against which they will not prevail in our day, in spite of so many dangers.

The next day Jesus desired to return into Galilee, where was His holy Mother. “He findeth Philip, and Jesus saith to him, Follow Me. Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip findeth Nathaniel, and saith to him, We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus, the son of Joseph of Nazareth. And Nathaniel said to him, Can anything of good come from Nazareth ? Philip saith to him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathaniel coming to Him, and He saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile. Nathaniel saith

* St. Matt. xvi. 18.

to him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said to him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathaniel answered Him and said, Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel. Jesus answered and said to him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, thou believest; greater things than these shalt thou see.”*

This fig tree being far away and out of sight, our Saviour thus convinced Nathaniel that His power was greater than that of man. With what simplicity did Nathaniel recognize the miracle, with what ardour did he confess it, and acknowledge Jesus for his Master and his God! This “Israelite indeed in whom there was no guile” is believed to be the brother of Philip, the Apostle St. Bartholomew.†

After having called these five first Apostles of the New Law, Jesus returned to His Mother. Let us rejoice in her joy, after such long days of solitude. St.

* St. John i. 43.

† Bartholmai, son of Tholmai or Ptolemee. “Histoire de J. C.” M. Foisset.

Bonaventure describes Mary recognizing her Son from afar, and hastening to meet Him with an inexpressible joy, and Jesus greeting her with tender reverence.

The Gospel does not say positively that Jesus took His disciples with Him to Nazareth. We may, however, suppose it, since three days afterwards, at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, "Jesus also was invited, and His disciples, to the marriage."*

We know that the first disciples did not at this time continually follow the steps of their master, and were not finally called till after the miraculous draught of fishes. But Jesus, who suffered them to return to their nets, doubtless often saw them, either in His journeys through Galilee, or at Nazareth, and we may well believe that she, whom the Church calls the Queen of Apostles was often present at those first conferences, in which our Saviour sowed in these hitherto unprepared souls the seeds which were to produce such marvellous fruits; she opened her maternal heart to those who were to

* "Vocatus est autem Jesus et discipuli ejus ad nuptias."—St. John ii. 2.

become the first servants of her Son. She loved them, served them, and by her prayers caused the holy words which struck their ears to descend likewise into their hearts. Now the little flock of the chosen of the Lord, was increased by some of those whom the Jews of Nazareth called the brethren of Jesus, because they were His kinsmen. They were James, and Simon, and Jude, sons of the faithful friend of the Blessed Virgin, Mary the wife of Cleophas.* Two other fishermen of Bethsaida joined themselves to them, James and John, sons of Zebedee, and this chosen army, which was to conquer the world to the Gospel, began to be formed under the eye of God, around Jesus and Mary.

Who would have said that these fishermen of Galilee, these simple men, ignorant of all human science, these poor disciples of a poor master, were destined to overthrow all that great pagan civilization, the queen and mistress of the whole uni-

* It is believed that Cleophas, or Alpheus, was the brother of St. Joseph, and that thus Mary was the sister-in-law of the Blessed Virgin. Perhaps there was some other connection between them besides.

verse, in whose hands were strength, riches, and science, and whose support were all the wicked passions of the human heart? What attractions had they to offer to men in the place of what they came to destroy? They said to the proud: "You are but dust;" to the rich, intoxicated by their riches, "Feed your brethren the poor, and lay up for yourselves treasures which the moth and rust cannot destroy;" to homicides, and there were many at a time in which human life went for nothing, "Not a hair falleth from an innocent head but God seeth it, and avengeth the oppressed;" to the monsters of impurity, whose crimes were a terror to the whole earth, they cried, "Repent, for sooner or later the vengeance of God will smite you."

And what were the arms they made use of to secure the triumph of this severe doctrine over the corrupt world, which rejected it with all its strength? Prayer, suffering, humiliation, and death.

And they have conquered. Fishermen, labourers, and peasants have shown themselves wiser than all philosophers, more eloquent than all orators, and stronger

than that pagan civilization which thought to crush them with a single blow. A day came on which they assembled for the last time, and then separated never to meet again on this earth ; and alone, with no other guide than the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, with no weapon but His grace, they bore the Gospel to the extremities of the earth ; and when the Lord saw that His good servant had laboured enough, each one of them finished his work, and sealed his testimony by dying, after the example of his Saviour, for the salvation of souls. Their deaths were not attended by earthly glory. Unknown for the most part, martyred far from their country, and treated like criminals or madmen, God and a few hidden and persecuted disciples were the only witnesses of their last sufferings. And yet God has in so wonderful a manner preserved for us the memory of these obscure deaths, that at the present time, the best argument against infidels is that saying of a great man, "I believe willingly a doctrine the witnesses of which died to prove it."

The first Pope of the Church of God was to give, as it were, a louder testimony

than the others, and according to the word of our Saviour, to be the light placed on a candlestick, to enlighten all men from afar; thus St. Peter died on the top of a hill, in the midst of mighty Rome, the capital of the whole world. He was crucified like his Master, but, being unwilling to accept the glory of exactly resembling Jesus on the cross, he asked his executioners to crucify him head downwards. His first successors were all martyred, and as brave soldiers fearlessly take the place of their dead companions, so, in the army of the Lord, the place was never vacant; the soldiers died around their chief, and each sex and every age shared one glorious fate. Christian mothers encouraged their children in their sufferings, and died after them, blessing the Lord. The blood of martyrs is the seed of martyrs, and when the sins of the wicked had exhausted the patience of God, He swept them from the face of the earth, and the Church rose up from the ruins of empires, in immortal youth. The Church is ever the same. Time has not weakened her strength. Ever weak in that which is the power of human

empires, she is durable and powerful, because she can suffer and die, and is ever rising again, like her Divine Founder, from the tomb in which the wicked think to bury her. As of old she still has her apostles, the depositories of the promises of Jesus Christ, inheritors of the power left by Him to the twelve fishermen of Galilee. These apostles are our bishops and priests; and as everything in the Church of Christ is renewed and perpetuated, we see the successors of the apostles and the princes of the Church chosen from all classes, as of old they were taken from among the sons of David, the peasants of Galilee, and the publicans. The brothers, the sons, and the comrades of the poorest Christian may be called to this apostolate, for which God requires no other nobility, no other treasure, and no other power, than that of sanctity. When the choice of God has fallen on a soul, when He has brought him from his father's house, and has confided him to the hands of the Church, to form him, to appropriate him to His holy ministry, He works in that soul miracles of grace and of transformation, and we

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recognise the hand of the same God who made of twelve ignorant men, the conquerors of the world, and the wonder of all ages.

Apostle signifies messenger. In all times, and in all places, there will be found in the midst of the Church the messengers of the Lord. In all times the Church, inspired by God, will send other messengers of the Lord to bear the light to those unhappy people whom it has not yet reached. "To go to the end of the world to save a soul and then die!" cried St. Francis Xavier. How many holy missionaries have repeated this generous cry, and have died in those distant lands, having sown with their blood the seed of Faith, and now look down from heaven upon the abundant harvest gathered in by their successors in the work. It is sometimes said that our century is not capable of these miracles of self-devotion, which were the glory of the first ages. Let us not calumniate our times. Who carried the light of the Gospel to China and Cochin-China, so long closed to civilization and truth? Who but holy missionaries and apostles, worthy successors

of the Apostles of Jesus Christ; martyrs, worthy successors of the first martyrs? They watered with their blood these heathen lands, and Faith sprang up. The Annals of the Propagation of the Faith relate their sufferings and victories.

The Society for the Propagation of the Faith sends missionaries across the seas, and maintains them in those ungrateful lands which reject them, as the land of Israel once rejected the Apostles of Jesus Christ. An alms of an halfpenny a month, and there are few too poor to give as much, sends out the necessary help to these generous missionaries our brethren, and helps to save thousands of souls. By giving a halfpenny a month, children may contribute to the work of the Holy Childhood, and send into vast countries of idolators good servants of God, who receive poor little children, abandoned through pagan barbarity, baptize them when in danger of death, and enrich heaven with thousands of innocent souls.

These alms are one means of contributing from afar to the labours of the Apostles whom the Church sends continually to gain souls. But there is another way

of giving apostles to the Church, which is to make ourselves apostles, not to distant lands or to idolators, but in the bosom of our family and in society. True, we have not the powers which Jesus Christ has given to His Apostles, and of which our Bishops and Priests are the sole inheritors. But in the family, the mother who teaches her children to know and love God, and whose blameless life is a fit model for her daughter—the father, who, by his example, leads his son in the path of honour and virtue—the faithful wife, whose patience, love, and constant gentleness, attracts her husband to the home which she endears to him—the young girl among her companions, the child at school, at catechism, or at home—can they not all be so many apostles, preaching, not so much in words as in actions? Is not a good Catholic family a living sermon in the world? Were we, each in our place, the imitators of the Apostles, and true children of the Saints, how beautiful the world would be! It would be the reign of God on earth.

Prayer.

O Mary, Queen of the Apostles, may we, by thy help, understand the Faith and the self-devotion of the first friends of Jesus Christ. Obtain for us the grace to obey those whom the Church places over us as their successors and representatives ; to believe them with the same faith as if thy Divine Son Himself spoke to us by their mouth. Obtain for us the grace to fulfil the apostolate which God confides to each of us ; and never to deny our Faith by word or action. Since God has placed us in a Christian society, in which we have not to confess Jesus Christ by a martyr's death, may we at least confess Him daily by a truly Christian life. Gather us often, O Mary, in thy sanctuaries, and may the holy truths revealed by thy Divine Son, sink into our souls, and, by the help of thy holy prayers, may they produce fruits of blessing for us and for others. Amen.

Resolution.

To show frankly and courageously by our actions the Faith we have in our hearts.

TWENTY-FOURTH DAY.

THE MARRIAGE FEAST AT CANA.

“Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye.”—St. John ii. 5.

Three days after the return of Jesus, the Gospel tells us: “There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee, and the Mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus also was invited, and His disciples, to the marriage. And the wine failing, the Mother of Jesus saith to Him: They have no wine. And Jesus saith to her: Woman, what is it to Me and to thee? My hour is not yet come. His Mother saith to the waiters, Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye. Now there were set there six water pots of stone, according to the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three measures apiece. Jesus saith to them, Fill the water pots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And Jesus saith to them, Draw out now, and carry to the chief steward of the

feast. And they carried it. And when the chief steward had tasted the water made wine, and knew not whence it was, but the waiters knew who had drawn the water, the chief steward calleth the bridegroom, and saith to him, Every man at first setteth forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee; and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.”*

There is a great lesson in this simple Gospel narrative; and as they read it the hearts of Mary's children overflow with joy, for the Gospel speaks of their Mother, and shows them the first of the miracles of Jesus, performed at Mary's prayer.

Here, for the first time since the holy Mother of Jesus found her Child in the temple, and took Him back to Nazareth, does the Gospel speak of her, and between these two scenes of her life, between the words of the Child Jesus in the Temple, and those of Jesus at the marriage in

* St. John ii. 1.

Cana, we shall find a touching likeness.

Cana was a little town of Galilee, two leagues from Nazareth. The bride and bridegroom, who were kinsfolk or friends of the Blessed Virgin, invited her to the wedding. The family was not rich; the guests had assembled in great numbers, and towards the middle of the feast the wine began to fail. Then Mary, whose heart felt for the confusion about to come upon the bride and bridegroom, came to Jesus, and with wonderful simplicity and confidence said to Him, in her sweet voice, "They have no wine." "Woman," our Saviour gravely answered her, "what is it to Me and to thee? My hour is not yet come."

Woman! Why does not Jesus call her Mother? He Who loves her with so filial and reverential a love! Eighteen years before, when Mary found Him in the temple at Jerusalem, amongst the doctors, He did not call her Mother, and answered her tender reproach in words almost severe: "How is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"* Then, as now, the

* St. Luke ii. 49.

majesty of the Eternal Word shone forth in the reply of the Son of Mary, and the Mother's voice seemed to have lost its power. But let us observe what follows. Mary bowed her head to the apparent rebuke; she humbly worshipped her God in her Son, and at once, O wonder of wonders! Jesus obeyed her. What are we to learn from this mystery? Why such severity, so speedily followed by filial obedience? Mary herself will teach us. "My soul," she says, "doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He hath regarded the *humility of His handmaid*, and behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." It is because of her humility that Mary was chosen to be the Mother of God. It is because of her humility that all generations of Christians, who have been, and will be until the end of time, have called her, and will call her, blessed. We see humility throughout her life. Humiliation precedes the glory of Mary, as the star of the morning precedes the dawn, as the dawn itself precedes the day. Thus it is that Mary's glory shows itself to be the

perfect image of the glory of her Son. The great Apostle St. Paul says of Him : "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross. For which cause God also hath exalted Him, and hath given Him a name which is above all names."* How deep were the woes, how bitter the humiliations, endured by Jesus and by Mary, before that hour in which the Eternal Father revealed the glory of His Son unto the eyes of men, by the marvels of His resurrection.

Our Saviour seemed to shrink from this miracle, the splendour of which would reveal His glory before the hour was come. "He performed many other miracles before the crowning miracle of His resurrection. But these were but as the links of a chain, of which the changing of the water into wine was the first. Thus this first miracle, shining through the veil of the obscure human life of Jesus Christ, caused Him before His time to enter upon that series of miraculous acts, the splendour of which wounded His humility, and

* Philip. ii. 8, 9.

which, as it were, anticipated the manifestation of His glory.”*

The great power of Mary becomes all the more evident through the refusal of her Son, which may have made us for a moment doubtful of it. It is as though to this humble Virgin the power were given, to delay or to hasten, according to her will, the manifestation of the Divine Omnipotence. When, at twelve years old, Jesus confounded the doctors in the very temple of Jerusalem, she claimed Him, and recalled Him to her side, and Jesus returned with her to Nazareth. She, as it were, delayed for eighteen years the rising of the sun which was to enlighten the world.” “At thirty years of age, He, the Sun of Justice, announced that His hour was not yet come to shine by His miracles at the marriage feast of Cana, but Mary, by her word, caused Him to hasten the hour of His miracles, as she had before caused Him to delay that of His public teaching.”† Mary, as we know,

* Auguste Nicholas, “*La Vierge Marie d’après l’Evangile*,” xvi. p. 401. The whole of this explanation is taken from this beautiful chapter.

† Nicholas xvi. p. 380.

had not this power of herself. She received it from Him Who obeyed her. And the miracle of the marriage feast in Cana, shows us exactly the nature of this power, and the way in which the holy Mother of God exercises it for the salvation of us all. She simply exposes our needs to her Son thus: "They have no wine." She humbles herself before Him, when He seems to rebuke her, and when the Heart of Jesus is overcome by His Mother's prayer, she says to us, with her sweet majesty, as she said long ago to the servants of the bridegroom, "*Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye.*"

How powerful are these words: "Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye." How infallibly would the miracles of the divine mercy follow upon them, did we but know how to hear and receive them from the lips of Mary. When, bowed down by the weight of a heavy sorrow, we go to invoke the mercy of Jesus, through the intercession of Mary, what strength should we receive, did we but resolve to submit ourselves wholly to Jesus, without reserve, and to do without hesitation, and in all cases promptly, whatsoever He com-

mands. The water of our weakness and cowardice would then indeed be changed into a generous wine, to revive our failing strength. Those who had seen us languishing and discouraged, would wonder to see that we had reserved for the last hour a strength of which they knew nothing. Our faith would be increased in the God, Who had worked this miracle within us, and Who had made His glory shine forth, as at the marriage feast in Cana, in the presence of His new disciples. "Disciples of Jesus," says a devout author, "you who believe in Him as though you believed not; whose faith fails you, as the wine failed the guests: do you desire to believe truly in Him, to be born to Christian Faith? If so, it must be through Mary, through honouring her, through her intercession, through her gracious and motherly influence. Such miracles of Faith, and of the conversion of men to her Divine Son, of changing water into wine, are strictly her miracles, her victories."*

The holy narratives of the Gospel con-

* Auguste Nicholas, xvii. p. 409.

tain almost always a twofold teaching: the literal history, instructive in itself, is, moreover, the symbol of a great truth; and it was the will of our Blessed Lord, who made use of parables and similitudes, to instruct the ignorant, that even the most simple events of His life should serve to open our souls to the highest truths. The moral and mystical lesson is united to the history, as the soul is united to the body. Thus, the miraculous draught of fishes represents to us souls drawn from the abyss of error; the new name given to Peter foretells the Papacy, the immoveable basis of the Church; the pardon granted to Magdalen announces mercy to all sinners; the resurrection of Lazarus promises to all the servants of God, a still more glorious resurrection; whilst the histories to which these miracles belong, show us our sweet Saviour, going up into a boat, with the fishers of Bethsaida; loving, pardoning, and weeping for His friend; or, as in the beautiful account of the marriage in Cana, presiding at a family feast, rejoicing in the joy of those He loves, as He grieves over their sorrows.

How beautiful is it, and how far above our comprehension, to see the King of Heaven, living our life, sharing our sorrows, and smiling upon our joys ! Our religion is said by some to be gloomy, and our God severe. Let those who so speak judge for themselves. The Gospel commences, the first apostles are chosen, the mission of the Eternal Word is about to begin, and behold our Saviour seated at table with His friends of Nazareth ; He consecrates their joy by His presence ; He performs His first miracle to spare them a trifling annoyance. Let us learn to apply to our own lives the holy examples of the life of Jesus. When a mother speaks to her child she bends towards it, and the child stands on tiptoe to listen, stretching its arms and raising its eyes towards her. Jesus has lowered Himself to us with a mother's tenderness ; let us raise ourselves towards Him, to hear and to understand Him. What is more like our daily life than this account of the marriage feast at Cana ? Kinsfolk and friends assembled to celebrate the wedding ; Jesus and His disciples among those first invited, and the Mother of Jesus present as the inti-

mate friend, helping the mother to prepare the repast.

May Jesus be among the first invited to our weddings. May the Blessed Virgin be the greatest friend of the family, the first consulted, the first called to share our joy and our labour. The pastors of the flock will then be without anxiety, and after having blessed the union of our children at the foot of the altar, they will be willing to see modest and Christian gaiety at home.

Marriage was in all times a holy and solemn thing. The gathering of kinsfolk and friends at so important an event of life is natural and good in itself, since it strengthens family ties, and their presence, by adding to the solemnity of the marriage ceremony, helps to engrave the precious memory in the heart. Even the feast, given to all the guests, is an ancient and venerable custom, which recalls the hospitality of the patriarchs. There is nothing forbidden in mirth, provided it be seemly. Thus, Jesus Christ and His holy Mother did not hesitate to go to the wedding to which religious parents invited them. By this honour, which He dis-

dained not to show them, our Saviour teaches us the holiness of marriage, and consecrates by His presence that indissoluble union which, in the Christian law, He has raised to the dignity of a sacrament. Moreover, it is His will to show us that the joy which accompanies a wedding, and the feast by which it is followed, may themselves be sanctified by His presence, and that of His holy Mother. That, from the highest heaven He disdains not to unite in the joy of Christian families, who invite Him to their weddings; that is to say, who consult Him, and pray to Him with their whole hearts, at this important moment of their lives, who call down His blessing with fervour upon the young bride and bridegroom, and who, even in their feasts, preserve the remembrance of His presence, putting from them with the greatest care all that might offend Him.

And why should not we invite Jesus and Mary to our feasts? In our sorrows and great necessities we are forced to think of them, and our prayer is but the cry of our grief. Why not think of them, then, in our joys, by a voluntary act of

gratitude and love ? Think you that they would not rejoice in it ? Who then loves us better than Jesus and Mary ? And even at our feasts and family meals, why should we avoid their eye ? Do not we rejoice in the joy of our children, and can we think that our hearts are more tender than that of our Father who is in heaven ?

The answer, alas ! is sad. If we invite not Jesus and Mary to our feasts, it is because we do not desire to make a seemly use of the gifts that God has given us, but to abuse them. All we have is from Him : from Him flow all our joys. When our labour has been successful, it is His blessing which has made it prosper. He has given us our children and our goods. He has made our harvests ripen. All things are His gift, even that wine which He increased at the feast in Cana of Galilee, at the prayer of His holy Mother, which He causes the vine to produce to support our strength, which He has chosen, with the bread that nourishes us, to be transformed into His Divine Blood in the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar ; even that wine, which, like all things made by God, is, when rightly

used, salutary and useful, but is too often turned by men to a baneful poison, depriving them of their reason, degrading them and lowering them in the eyes of their children, and causing them in a few moments to lose the fruit of a labour which belonged to their family. All these goods, which we too often abuse, are the gift of God. Have we never thought that He can withdraw them? While the harvesters are feasting and drinking at the close of an abundant harvest, the lightning may fall, and in a single instant burn up the harvest, and perhaps the reapers. Whilst our children are dancing and amusing themselves, forgetful of God, the house may fall on them and crush them, like the sons of Job, who all perished during a feast. How many men have gone out, their heads confused by wine, and have fallen, never to rise again, or have been drowned without a thought of asking mercy. Everything that we see in this world belongs to God. And chastisement follows close upon the abuse of His gifts. We should never make a bad use of anything, if we considered that the eye of the Master is ever upon us.

But the eye of the Master is also the eye of a Father. Let us not fly from it. Let us, on the contrary, seek it; let us call it down on us. Let us use the gifts of our Father, and bless Him, but let us never abuse them.

Let us imitate that happy bridal pair at Cana, who received the signal honour of having Jesus and Mary at their wedding. There cannot be a real feast, it is said, without kinsfolk and friends. Truly nothing is sweeter than to rejoice with those we love and who love us. What better friends shall we ever have than Jesus and Mary? Mary is a kind mother, who watches over her children at all hours; a tender mother, ever ready to come amongst them. But she is a Mother who requires our reverence. Like her divine Son, she is purity itself. Unbecoming words offend her, she withdraws; and can we think that our Lord is disposed to bless feasts at which He, as well as His holy Mother, is offended? Let us rather fear that they may draw down His curse.

We need be none the less mirthful, nor need the feast be less pleasant. Pure

hearts alone have the secret of true joy, of that joy whose morrow is as sweet as its eve, and which is never darkened by remorse. Let us ask it of Mary. The Mother of Sorrows has also the secret of unclouded rejoicing. When we ask it of her, she will reply to us, as she replied long ago to the servants at the bridal feast of Cana, "Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye."

With the consciousness of duty performed, and of the law of God faithfully observed, our rest will be as joyous as our labour has been sweet, and Mary, present in our pleasures as in our sorrows, will know how to increase our joy, as well as to console our sorrows.

Prayer.

O kind Mother, whose tender and holy intercession opened for us the source of our Saviour's miracles, teach us the secret of thy prayer. Teach us to make known our wants with simplicity, to wait with patience, to resign ourselves when God appears severe, and to do with confidence all that He commands us. When we

have prayed aright, teach us to accept as an appointment of His wisdom, the success that may follow our petition. If it be according to our desire, help us to thank Him. If it be contrary, help us to submit ourselves, in the deep conviction that He who ransomed us at the price of His Blood, loves us more than we love ourselves; that He Who created us knows better than we, what is fit for His creatures. Be present, O holy Mother, at all the actions of our life. May the thought of thee guide, restrain, gladden, and console us. And as thou hast been near us all the days of our life, be near us also in the hour of death, that it may be for us the commencement of a happy eternity in thy holy presence, and that of thy Divine Son. Amen.

Practice.

To judge of all our actions by asking ourselves this question: Should I do this without fear in the presence of Jesus and Mary?

TWENTY-FIFTH DAY.

THE LIFE OF MARY DURING THE PUBLIC
MINISTRY OF JESUS—THE SILENCE OF
THE GOSPEL—JESUS PREACHING AT NA-
ZARETH—HIS DEPARTURE—THE MISERY
OF THOSE WHO LOSE HIS HOLY PRE-
SENCE.

*“Blessed is the womb that bore Thee,
and the breasts that gave Thee suck.
Yea, rather, blessed are they who hear the
word of God and keep it.”—St. Luke xi.
27.*

After the miracle at Cana our holy Mother returned to the solitude of Nazareth. Her Son did not remain with her. The time was past in which the Eternal Word dwelt hidden under the roof of His mortal Mother, as now in the tabernacles of our poor churches. The Sun of Justice was rising, and shedding His rays of blessing over the fields and villages of Galilee, over the Sea of Tiberias, and over the humble fishermen who peopled its banks. Then it was that the gentle light of Mary,

which had shone almost alone during the long obscurity of the Infancy and Youth of Jesus, was eclipsed by the dazzling brightness of the Sun of Righteousness.

“I arose in the night with David,” says Bossuet, “to behold Thy heavens, the works of Thy fingers; the moon and the stars which Thou hast established. What a wonderful image did I see, O Lord, of the effects of Thine infinite light! The sun advanced and made known his approach by a heavenly glow, which spread all around; the stars had disappeared, and the moon had risen with her crescent of silver, so beautiful and bright that it charmed the sight. She seemed to wish to honour the sun, by appearing bright and illuminated on the side she turned towards him; all the rest was dark and shadowy; a little semicircle alone received a splendid brightness from the rays of the sun, as if from the father of light. She then paid a new homage to the heavenly source of her radiance. As he drew near I saw her disappear; the faint crescent diminished little by little, and when the sun had fully risen, her pale and feeble light vanished, and was

lost in that of the great luminary in which she seemed to be absorbed. She could not have lost her light by the approach of the sun, from which she derived it; but a small luminary vanished before a greater, the fainter light lost itself in the more brilliant, and the crescent was no longer to be seen in the heavens, in which it had held so conspicuous a place amongst the stars."

We have often seen that which the great bishop describes so beautifully, for none are better able than the dwellers in the country to find the image of God at all times in His works. We can easily apply these words to the gentle Virgin Mary, whose beauty is so often compared to that of the moon.

The Gospel only tells us as much of her history as is necessary to make us acquainted with that of Jesus. She seems to wish to honour her Son by only appearing bright and illuminated on the side she turns to Him. All the rest is dark. How beautiful is the brightness which she receives from the Sun of Justice. And yet, as He rises, she humbly fades away; not that the Divine Sun,

which causes her to shine can lessen her brightness, but because the dependant luminary loses itself in that which is supreme. Until that day, at once sorrowful and blessed, in which she reappears standing at the foot of the cross, when the light of the world is for a time eclipsed on Calvary, she is but twice mentioned by the Gospel, and then it is only to relate two words of our Saviour, which at first sight appear severe and almost harsh, like those He spoke to her in the Temple at Jerusalem, and at Cana of Galilee. An ordinary mother would turn pale at hearing them spoken by her son.

The first time was when Jesus was at Capharnaum, speaking to the multitude which pressed around Him. His Mother was outside, with those whom the Evangelist calls His brethren, according to the custom of the Hebrew and Syriac languages, which comprise brothers and cousins under the same name, and they sought to speak to Him.* “And one said to Jesus: Behold Thy Mother and Thy brethren stand without seeking for Thee.

* The Gospel calls by this name the four sons of Mary of Cleophas, James, Simon, Jude, and Joseph.

But He, answering him that told Him, said: Who is My Mother, and who are My brethren? And, stretching forth His Hand towards His disciples, He said: Behold My Mother and My brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of My Father that is in heaven, he is My brother, and sister, and mother.”* The second time was as He was speaking to the people. “A certain woman from the crowd, lifting up her voice, said to Him: Blessed is the womb that bore Thee, and the breasts that gave Thee suck. But He said: Yea, rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.”†

Was Mary sorrowful at these words, as an ordinary mother would have been? Far from us be such a thought. The heart of Mary was too intimately united to the Heart of Jesus, not to understand all Its sentiments, and see ever the tenderness of her Son united to the sovereign wisdom of her God. Thus, whilst our Saviour seemed to forget the Mother He loved so much, to extend His love over all the creatures whose salvation God had

* St. Matt. xii. 47.

† St. Luke xi. 27.

confided to Him; whilst the Teacher of the world, the universal mediator of all creatures, seemed to have taken the place of the Son of Mary; this Mother, to whom none can compare, saw farther than we can into the Heart of her Son, accepted these apparent slights, and heard Jesus say to her, as Solomon said of old to his mother, "My Mother, ask, for I must not turn away thy face."

And we children of Mary, let us not be hurt at this seeming neglect, let us rather see in it the evident sign of the sanctity of our Mother. "Jesus coming as Saviour, as Physician, and as Shepherd, gave a greater share of His time and of His cares to lost sheep, to the sick, and to sinners," than to the just. "He neglected Mary because He had prevented in her the evil He came to cure in us." It was because Mary was the holiest of creatures that God gave her a share in the desolations, contradictions, humiliations, and trials, which are so often the portion of the just in this world, because God has an eternity with which to reward them in heaven, whilst consolations and encouragements are for sinners, who require to

be led back from afar, and nourished with milk before they can bear stronger food.

Besides, when our Lord in His goodness calls His brethren, His sisters, and His Mother, whosoever shall do the will of His Father that is in heaven; when, in answer to that woman of Israel who called blessed the Mother who had borne and nourished Him, He said, "Yea, rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it," He in no degree excludes Mary from the number of those whom He thus exalts. On the contrary, He shows what would be the merit and sanctity of Mary independently of what was only her glory.

Because Mary, preserved from all sin from her conception, had since been the holiest and the most faithful of creatures, therefore had God chosen her to be the Mother of His Son. Her merit is in her sanctity, as her honour is in her Divine Maternity. As no creature ever equalled Mary in holiness, so none was ever more worthy to be of the number of those whom our Saviour honoured with His tenderness and declared blessed; and as she

surpassed all creatures in holiness, it is certain that she held the first place among those of whom Jesus said: "Whosoever shall do the will of My Father that is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother."

The absence of Jesus was the greatest of sacrifices to Mary, but she accepted it willingly for our salvation; the apparent severity of His words never grieved her heart, which knew so well the Heart of her Son. The true cause of her sufferings was the ingratitude and hatred which followed the steps of Him, Who was born for the salvation of the good, and for the scandal and fall of the wicked. Whilst miracles were being multiplied in Galilee, whilst the blind saw and the lame walked at the word of Jesus; whilst at His command the devils left the bodies of those they had possessed, confessing with rage that He was the Son of God; whilst all sicknesses and infirmities were healed, and simple souls were enlightened by His doctrines, the Pharisees were scandalized, and began to lay snares for Him; and even at Nazareth, His own country, many of the

kinsfolk of Jesus did not believe in Him.*

The Gospel tells us that Jesus returned to "Nazareth, where He had been brought up; He went, according to His custom, into the synagogue on the Sabbath day; and He rose up to read, and the Book of Isaias the Prophet was delivered unto Him. And as He unfolded the book He found the place where it was written: The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, wherefore He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor, He hath sent Me to heal the contrite of heart, to preach deliverance to the captives, and sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of reward. And when He had folded the book, He restored it to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him."† And applying to Himself the words He had just read, He said, "This day is fulfilled this Scripture in your ears." As He went on to explain these words, they were all in wonder, and said

* "Neque enim fratres ejus credebant in eum." St. John vii. 5.

† St. Luke iv. 17-20.

one to another: "What is this wisdom which is given to Him? and how does He work so many miracles? How has He learnt, having never been taught? Is He not the carpenter, the son of Joseph? Is it not He whose Mother is called Mary?" And they were scandalized at Jesus. Some said: "Physician, heal Thyself." Others cried: "Do here in Thy own country as great miracles as we have heard Thou hast done at Capharnaum." Jesus answered them: "Amen, I say to you that no prophet is accepted in his own country.....In Israel itself there were many widows in the days of Elias, when heaven was shut up three years and six months, and when there was a great famine throughout all the earth, and to none of them was Elias sent, but to Sarepta of Sidon, to a widow woman. And in Israel there were many lepers, in the time of Eliseus the prophet, and none of them was cleansed but Naaman the Syrian."

"And all they in the synagogue, hearing these things, were filled with anger. And they rose up and cast Him out of the city; and they brought Him to the brow of the

hill whereon their city Nazareth was built that they might cast Him down headlong."*

Who can describe the terror of our holy Mother! She heard the tumult in the synagogue; she heard the cries of death, and saw the furious multitude dragging out her son; she called upon her friends and kinsfolk for help. But Jesus was now on the edge of the precipice, and it seemed that the Jews were already about to murder their God!† No; in the simple words of the Gospel, we are told, "But He, passing through the midst of them, went His way."

The wicked can do evil only as long as God suffers it; and when they have filled

* Harmony of M. Foisset.

† "Between the steep mountain from which the Jews intended to cast down Jesus Christ, and the city of Nazareth, may be seen half way," says Father Geramb, "the ruins of a monastery, formerly inhabited by monks, and those of a church built by St. Helena, and dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, under the name of 'Our Lady del Tremore,' 'Our Lady of Fear.' According to some authors, Mary was already at this place while the Jews were dragging her Son towards the precipice, to cast Him down. According to others, at the news of the murderous intentions of these madmen, she had run in haste, but had arrived too late. Seized with terror she was not able to go farther."

up the measure of their iniquity, He punishes them by withdrawing Himself from them. At Nazareth the Child Jesus had grown up; there the Saviour had given His first instructions; there Mary had lived, and had spread around the perfume of her virtues and example: but Nazareth rejected its Lord; the whole of this ungrateful people rose against a single unarmed Man. They were already on the hill; it seemed that nothing could stop them; Mary stretched out her hands in vain.....then Jesus, "passing through the midst of them, went His way." And the people of Nazareth returned in confusion from the mountain, asking each other what had become of Jesus. •

Depart, you wretches, you shall see Him no more. He came to announce to you the kingdom of God, and the end of your sufferings, to shelter you as the hen shelters her chickens under her wings, and you would not. Jesus will weep over you as over Jerusalem, but you will see Him no more. You will see Mary no more; the sweet Virgin who has lived thirty years among you doing good. Her consoling voice will no longer be heard at

the bedside of your sick ; the alms of her poverty will no more relieve your poor ; the peace of her soul will no longer calm your sufferings. The Son has left you, you shall no longer have the Mother. Mary was only at Nazareth to attend upon Jesus, Where her Son is, there is her country. She said farewell once again and for ever to the house in which she was born. The holy women her friends and Sisters, Mary of Cleophas, Salome wife of Zebedee, Suzanna and Joannah wife of Chusa, went with her. They followed from afar the steps of Jesus, humbly hidden in the crowd which listened to Him, preparing the poor shelter in which the Son of Man was to repose each night with His disciples, sometimes begging their poor food. Mary was ever retiring and humble, not obtruding even her tenderness upon Jesus, and loving and serving each one of the apostles for love of her Son. Surrounded by her holy companions, she shared the exile and journeys of Jesus. The dove no longer found a nest in the rock where her parents were sheltered.

Wo to the country, city, or village,

which rejects Jesus and Mary, which turns a deaf ear to the holy word of God, which shuts its eyes to the continual miracles of divine mercy. The graces which we abuse or reject will become terrible accusations against us in the day of judgment; and in that day of retribution, the state of the poor savage upon whom the light of faith has never shone, will be better far than that of the Christian who has never lived as one. "Wo to thee, Corozain," said our dear Saviour with a sigh, as He was leaving one of the villages of Galilee, "Wo to thee, Bethsaida, for if in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in you, they had long ago done penance in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And thou Capharnaum, shalt thou be exalted up into heaven? Thou shalt go down even unto hell. For if in Sodom had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in thee, perhaps it had remained unto this day. But I say unto you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judg-

ment than for thee." Let us beware lest our Saviour, when He has become our Judge, put us to shame for our own lives, so devoid of good works, so overflowing with God's graces, by setting before us the life of one of our brethren, born far from God, in a land in which Christianity is hardly known, in a family in which God is not loved, but who has deserved, by the purity of his soul, the light given to him as a reward, and withdrawn from us for our punishment. Let us not compare our lives with those of great sinners, and say we are better than they; if they had received our graces, perhaps they would have become saints, whilst we are but sinners. No doubt they have lost grace through their own fault, and God has withdrawn Himself from them as from the inhabitants of Nazareth, because they refused His presence. But have we never deserved that He should leave us? Should we be filled with pride because His mercy has not yet abandoned us? Let us fear, above all things, lest Jesus should leave our souls. Let us call upon Him, and prepare for Him a perpetual dwelling within us. Let us furnish it the best we

can, and as everything is dark where He is not, let us say to Him, as the disciples said to Him at Emmaus, "Lord, stay with us, because it is towards evening, and the day is far spent."

Prayer.

Blessed art thou, O holy Virgin Mary, because from thy virginal womb has risen the sun of justice.* O holy and bright dawn of that light which enlightens the just in this world, shed thy pure radiance into my soul, that there may remain in it none of that voluntary darkness which rejects the light of God when it deigns to come down upon it.† O holy Mother of God, who didst suffer so much from the absence of thy Son, who didst follow Him in His painful journeys, whose holy presence was so sweet to Him, and whom He only left to go and seek from afar the lost sheep of Israel, teach us to love the presence of Jesus, to seek it as that of a

* "Beata es, Sancta Virgo Maria, quia ex te ortus est Sol Justitiæ."

† "Et lux in tenebris lucet et tenebræ eam non comprehenderunt."

friend instead of fearing it as that of a Judge. Obtain for us, by thy holy prayers, the grace to remain with thee and thy Divine Son all the days of our mortal life, that we may dwell with Him and thee for all eternity.

Practice.

To place ourselves often in the presence of Jesus and Mary : to remember that sin drives them away, and that repentance recalls them, but that the abuse of grace may cause them to leave us for ever.

TWENTY-SIXTH DAY.

THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE PASSION—
THE BLESSED VIRGIN MEETS JESUS ON
THE WAY TO CALVARY.

“If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”—St. Luke ix. 23.

The time was accomplished: the voice of the Good Shepherd had been heard throughout Israel, and many had come to hear Him. Almost every page of the Gospel tells us of the flocks gathered round Jesus; for them the loaves were miraculously multiplied in the desert; on them the most luminous teaching, the most touching parables, and the most striking miracles were lavished: but in spite of all this, wonder, doubt, and fear filled the greater number, and only the few were touched to the heart. Out of ten lepers, whom our Lord healed, nine went their way without returning thanks; one only prostrated himself at His feet,

and he was a stranger, and not of the sons of Israel. Out of all that multitude whose infirmities and sicknesses Jesus had cured, there were, alas, but a very small number who followed His footsteps. If a soul is to hear the word of God, human passions must not speak too loud; if a heart is to be capable of thankfulness, the poison of selfishness and pride must be absent from it. Whilst the little troop of chosen ones was being formed under the eye of our Saviour, men with false, proud, and cruel hearts were rising against Him; men who thought themselves saints because they followed slavishly the letter of the law, without practising its spirit; who rebuked the disciples for gathering ears of corn to satisfy their hunger on the Sabbath day, and the Saviour Himself for healing the sick on that day of rest; but who did not scruple to hate their brethren, and to persecute the innocent; Pharisees and doctors of that law every page of which announced the coming Saviour, all these were plotting His death. By their artifices they had deceived and stirred up the people, and even among the most beloved disciples of Jesus, in the small

number of those chosen apostles, who for three years had dwelt in the constant rays of His light, and had tasted the wonderful charm of His love, they had found a man with a heart so base as to betray his Saviour and his God.

The Pasch was approaching, and this time it was the true Lamb who was to be sacrificed, and Jerusalem saw the sunset which introduced that week, called by all succeeding centuries Holy Week, the yearly return of which every Christian hails with a mixture of sorrow and of joy ; for he knows that his sins have caused the death of his Saviour, but that that death is the source of all his hope. Six days before the Pasch, our Saviour reached Bethania, a little village close to Jerusalem. There Lazarus, the friend whom Jesus had called to life from the tomb, lived with his sisters Martha and Mary. Mary was that sinful woman from whom, the Evangelist St. John tells us that Jesus had cast seven devils, and who from that time believing in Him, had left all to hear His words, had washed away the shame of a guilty life with her tears ; she was the model of all penitent souls,

the beloved daughter of Mary, and the devout handmaid of Jesus. Although the Gospel does not say so, pious writers suppose that our holy Mother was at Bethania, in the house of Martha and Mary Magdalen.*

A supper was prepared for Jesus in the house of Simon the Leper, one of the inhabitants of Bethania, "and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of them that were at table with Him. Mary, therefore, took a pound of ointment, of right spikenard, of great price, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, he that was about to betray Him, said: Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? Now he said this, not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and having the purse, carried the things that were put therein."† It is easy to see that the avarice and covetousness of this un-

* St. Bonaventure's *Meditations on the Passion*; *The Foot of the Cross*. Faber.

† St. John xii.

faithful servant, were the first cause of his fall. He stole the little treasure, the care of which Jesus had confided to him, and he blamed Magdalen's pious action, because he wished to steal the money of the poor. He afterwards sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver. Let the thought of the abyss of sin into which he was led by his first theft, teach us all to respect the goods of others. But Jesus said : " Let her alone, why do you molest her ? She hath wrought a good work upon Me. For the poor you have always with you, and whensoever you will you may do them good ; but Me you have not always. What she had she hath done ; she is come beforehand to anoint My Body for the burial. Amen, I say to you, wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, that also which she hath done shall be told for a memorial of her."*

Jesus spoke of His burial. His disciples heard Him with sorrow. In the heart of the traitor the divine tenderness of Jesus was pleading against avarice and

* St. Mark xiv. 6.

pride; the holy voice he had heard for three years was sounding in his ear. What did he do? The Gospel says: "Then went one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, to the chief priests, and said to them, What will you give me, and I will deliver Him unto you? But they appointed him thirty pieces of silver. And from thenceforth he sought opportunity to betray Him."*

The day which was witness of this shameful deed answers to the Saturday before Palm Sunday with us. "And it came to pass when He was come nigh to Bethphage and Bethania, unto the Mount called Olivet, He sent two of His disciples, saying, Go into the town which is over against you, at your entering into which you shall find the colt of an ass tied, on which no man ever hath sitten, loose him and bring him hither. And if any man shall ask you, Why do you loose him? you shall say thus unto him, Because the Lord hath need of his service."† The disciples obeyed: they brought the humble beast, and spreading their gar-

* St. Matt. xxvi. 14.

† St. Luke xix. 29.

ments upon it, they made Jesus sit on it. And the Gospel tells us all this was done that the word of the prophet might be fulfilled: *Fear not, daughter of Sion. Behold thy King cometh sitting on an ass's colt.*"

And on the next day, "a great multitude that was come to the festival day, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet Him. And many spread their garments in the way, and others cut down boughs from the trees, and strewed them in the way. And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna, blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Blessed be the kingdom of our Father David, that cometh. Hosanna in the highest!"*

Those who were with Jesus when He called Lazarus from the tomb, and raised him from the dead, gave testimony of this miracle, and this was what made the multitude gather round Jesus. When He was coming near the descent of Mount Olivet, the whole multitude of disciples,

* St. John xii.

filled with joy, began to praise God in a loud voice, for all the wonders they had seen, and they cried, "Blessed be the King who cometh in the name of the Lord, peace in heaven and glory on high." And some of the Pharisees said one to another, "Do you see that we prevail nothing? Behold, the whole world is gone after Him." Other Pharisees, who were amongst the crowd, annoyed at the acclamations of the people, said to Him: "Master, rebuke Thy disciples." He replied to them: "I say to you, that if these hold their peace, the stones will cry out."

Whence is this triumph? Are the wicked overcome, and will the world be spared the murder of its God? Will not Christ be the Man of Sorrows, and is the Son of David about to enter into His inheritance, received at last by those to whom He is come to bring salvation? The Gospel goes on: "And when Jesus drew near, seeing the city, He wept over it, saying, If thou also hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace, but now they are hidden from thy eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, and thy enemies shall cast a trench

about thee, and compass thee round, and straiten thee on every side, and beat thee flat to the ground, and thy children who are in thee. And they shall not leave in thee a stone upon a stone. Because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation.”*

No; these streets of Jerusalem, strewn with the palms and garments thrown under the feet of the most gentle of kings, were not on that day in their true clothing. Soon another triumph began. Instead of the devout hosannas of the multitude, cries of death resounded. Instead of being strewn with palms, the streets were stained with the Blood of the Just One, which flowed freely as He passed. Even on the threshold of those guilty houses, in which the few good were hiding themselves in their cowardly fear, and from which issued the furious crowd of the wicked, even on them the Blood of the true Lamb flowed, but this time it was to mark them out for the vengeance of God. And yet His Blood is so mercifully shed for the salvation of all, that

* St. Luke xix 41.

even the wretches who drag the Sacred Victim to His death have only to be converted in order to be saved by that same death ; and there is nothing so impure or so guilty but it may become white as snow in the Blood of the Lamb. This way of sorrows, which begins at the tribunal of Pilate, and ends on Calvary, opens to us all the way of salvation, the way that ends in heaven, the royal way of the holy cross.

Here, we shall once more meet our Mother. We are told nothing of her, when, in the evening of Palm Sunday, Jesus raised His voice to His Father, in the presence of the wondering multitude, praying to Him to glorify His Name in His Son, and the voice of God replied : " I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." We are told nothing of her again on the Monday and Tuesday, when Jesus drove the buyers and sellers from the temple, in the majesty of His divine wrath ; when He confounded the Pharisees, who tried to ensnare Him in His speech ; and when He reiterated His last instructions to His disciples, like a father who is about to die. We do not even find

her in the supper room, when our Saviour, by the most wonderful miracle of His love, gave to His Apostles His Body for food, and His Blood for drink. But on the way to Calvary behold her once more.

In the evening of Maunday Thursday, when the treason of Judas had just been committed, as a devout author tells us, "With the brave and gentle Magdalen, she goes forth into the streets. She tries to gain admittance, both to the houses of Annas and of Caiphas, but is repulsed, as she was at Bethlehem, three-and-thirty years ago. She hears the voice of Jesus; she hears also, the blows given to her Beloved. Jesus is put in prison for the night, and St. John comes forth and leads our Blessed Mother home, to the house in which the last supper had been eaten. At the horrors of the morning, she is present. She hears the sound of the scourging, and sees Him at the pillar, and the people around Him sprinkled with His Blood. She hears the gentle murmurs, the almost inaudible bleatings of her spotless Lamb. She hears them, and omnipotence commands her still to live. In spirit, if not in bodily presence, she has seen the guards

of Herod mock her everlasting. She has beheld the ruffians in the guard-room celebrate the cruel coronation of the Almighty King. She has seen the eyes of the All-seeing, bandaged, and the offscouring of the people daring to bend the knee in derision before Him who is one day to pronounce their endless doom. She has looked up to the steps of Pilate's Hall, and has beheld, beautiful in His disfigurement, Him, who was a worm and no man, so had they trodden Him underfoot, and mangled Him, and turned Him almost out of human shape by their atrocities. She heard Pilate say, 'Behold the Man,' and verily there was need some one should say that He was a man, who if He had been only Man, could never have survived the crushing of the wine-press, which the threefold pressure of His Father, of demons, and of men had inflicted upon Him. Then rose over the crowded Piazza, that wild yell of blasphemous rejection by His own people, which still rings in our ears, still echoes in history, still dwells even in that calm heaven above, in the Mother's ear who heard it, in all the savage frightfulness of its reality. Now the Magdalen

leads her home, whither John is to come with news of the sentence when it is passed. St. John at length returns to the house with the news of the sentence, and other information. Our dearest mother, broken-hearted yet beaming, as with divine light in her tranquillity prepares to leave the house with Magdalen and the apostle. The latter, by his knowledge of the city, will lead her to the end of a street, where she can meet Jesus on His road to Calvary. Everywhere the streets are thronged with multitudes setting in one tide to Calvary. Heralds at the corners of the streets, blow their harsh trumpets, and proclaim the sentence to the people. Mary draws her veil around her. John and Magdalen lean their broken hearts on hers, for they are faint and sick. What a journey for a mother! She hardly takes note of the streets, but with their shadows they fling into her soul dim memories of the Pasch twenty-one years ago, and three bitter days that followed it. She has taken her place silent and still. She does not even tremble. Some tears flow, as if spontaneously from her eyes. But her cheeks are red? Yes—her tears were

blood. The procession comes in sight. The tall horse of the centurion shows first and leads the way. The trumpet sounds with a wailing clangour. The women look from the lattices above. She sees the thieves, the crosses, everything—and yet only one thing, Himself. As He draws nigh, the peace of her heart grows deeper. It could not help it. God was approaching, and peace went before Him. Never had maternal love sat on such a throne, as that one on Mary's heart. The anguish was unutterable. God, who knows the number of the sands of the sea, knows it. Now Jesus has come to her. He halts for a moment. He lifts the one hand that is free, and clears the blood from His eyes. Is it to see her? Rather that she may see Him, His look of sadness, His look of love. She approaches to embrace Him. The soldiers thrust her rudely back. O misery! and she is His Mother too! For a moment she reeled with the push, and then again was still, her eyes fixed on His, His eyes fixed on hers, such a link, such an embrace, such an outpouring of love, such an overflow of sorrow! Has He less strength than she? See! He staggers, is

overweighed by the burden of the ponderous cross, and falls with a dull dead sound upon the street, like the clank of falling wood. She sees it. The God of heaven and earth is down. Men surround Him, like butchers round a fallen beast. They kick Him, beat Him, swear horrible oaths at Him, drag Him up again, with cruel ferocity. It is His first fall. She sees it. He is her Babe of Bethlehem. She is helpless. She cannot get near. Omnipotence held her heart fast. In a peace far beyond man's understanding, she followed slowly on to Calvary. Magdalen and John beside themselves with grief, but feeling as if grace went out from her blue mantle, enabling them also to live with broken hearts."*

What a picture is this, and yet, as the writer himself says, it is only the outside. No human soul, however holy, is able to measure the grief of Mary; and we can only cry out with the prophet: "To what shall I equal thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Sion! for great as the sea is thy destruction." Not that

* Foot of the Cross, ch. v. 245.

the sea is its true measure, but because, as the sea incomparably surpasses all other waters in depth and extent, so Mary's sorrows surpass all other sorrows.* But in the midst of this ocean of sorrows we may well believe, that one of the most bitter, is the flight of the Apostles and Disciples, who are dispersed as a flock, whose shepherd has been struck, and who weep far from Jesus and Mary. All their enemies are there, and of their friends, there will be on Calvary only a few faithful women, and one disciple, John, the beloved disciple, whose love is stronger because the love of Jesus for him has given him strength. "Only John is there, drawn by his Saviour's love of him rather than urged by his own love of Jesus."† Even Peter, the ardent generous Peter, the chosen chief of the new Church, Peter has denied his Lord, at the voice of a servant maid. That which wounds the heart of Jesus more than any torture, is the treason of Judas, the faithless apostle, fallen like Lucifer from the height of God's friend-

* Hugh of St. Victor, quoted by Nicolas.

† The Foot of the Cross. Faber, p. 253.

ship, and above all, the thought that sufferings so great will avail nothing to so many souls, who will refuse to be saved. And as Mary's broken heart ever vibrates in unison with that of her Son; that also is her chief sorrow. Shall we renew it? Shall we be with the cowardly disciples who hide themselves and weep, or with those holy women who follow after Mary, with His faithful disciple John, and the holy Magdalen, the personification of love and repentance? Those trembling disciples and Apostles were not yet ransomed by the Precious Blood, which, for them and for us, was about to flow even to the last drop. Healed by the sufferings of their Master of the plague which sin had brought upon the human race, and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, we know what they became, heroes, saints, and martyrs. Would they have abandoned Jesus and Mary on the way to Calvary, if they had been at that time what they afterwards became? We are ransomed by the blood which ransomed them, we are strengthened by the Holy Spirit Who made them heroes. We then should have no excuse if we abandoned Jesus and

Mary on the way to Calvary. Let us follow their steps: the way trodden by Jesus and Mary is assuredly the way that leads to heaven.

But the way is difficult, and our Saviour well knew that as soon as they entered upon it, His servants would hear, within as well as without, many voices calling them back. Thus He tells us, in nearly every page of the Gospel, that this way is the only one that leads to Him. He has also caused it to be pointed out to us by all the Apostles, whom He has inspired, and for centuries He has caused all His saints to walk in it before us. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."* And farther on: "Unless a man take up his cross and follow Me, he cannot be My disciple."

This way it was which St. Paul showed to the first Christians of Corinth, when he preached to them, instead of the soft divinities of Greece, "Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumbling-block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness."† He

* St. Luke ix. 23.

† I. Cor. i. 23.

himself bravely trod it when he said to the Christians of Galatia : God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ ;”* and to the Christians of Jerusalem : “ Laying aside every weight and sin which surrounds us, let us run by patience to the fight proposed to us. Looking on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, Who having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and now sitteth on the right hand of the throne of God.”† The glorious apostle St. Andrew was drawing near to the end of this same road, when, seeing from afar the cross on which he was about to die like his Master, he stretched his arms towards it, crying with a wonderful burst of joy, “ O beloved cross, so dearly loved and so long desired !” Walking in the footsteps of their Master, the Apostles and disciples of those days almost all went, like Him, to torture and death. As the centuries went on, trials changed their character. But let us read the lives of the saints, and see if we find a single one in which the cross does not

* Gal. vi. 14.

† Heb. xii. 1, 2.

master everything else, in which suffering bravely accepted or voluntarily sought for, does not conduct the elect of God in the footsteps of their Saviour, in the way to Calvary. Lives the most distinct and separated from one another are united in this, and on the throne as in the cottage, in the cell of the religious as in the open fields, all the servants of Jesus Christ have borne the cross. And how have they borne it? By suffering humbly and bravely their daily pains. Truly there are some who have borne it so high that we should be tempted to pronounce ourselves incapable of such an effort, we who are bowed down to the earth by the least burden. But God proportions the weight of the cross to the strength of His servants. What we must do is to accept willingly, those crosses which He sends us, and carry them, whatever they may be. If we cannot, like the great Apostle, run to meet the combat which is proposed to us, let us at least walk towards it without shrinking, let us walk towards it, as he says, through patience; and if ever we feel ourselves crushed under the weight of this saving cross, let us remember that it

was the will of our sweet Saviour to bear one so heavy as to cause Him to stagger and fall under its weight.

How would our sufferings be lessened if we always saw in them the cross of Jesus Christ! We should accept them as the glorious marks by which His servants are recognized on earth, and by which He Himself will recognize them at the last day. When we see from afar the cross shining on the summit of any building, however humble, we say to ourselves, "It is the house of God." When we look upon a human life, however humble, in which suffering has been sweetly and patiently borne, we can say to ourselves, "God is there;" and whilst pitying the sufferings of our brother, we can console him by the hope of an eternal reward, and endeavour ourselves to suffer like him in order to merit the same reward.

Let us love the cross, for it is the first sign with which the Church signed us in baptism, when she adopted us as her children; and it will be the last with which she will sign us when she recommends to the mercy of God our soul, about to appear before Him. Let us love the cross,

for while leading us to heaven, it will enable us to find on earth true peace in duty performed. The divine Blood which flowed on that cross reconciled all things, the Apostle tells us, on earth and in heaven.* Through the cross there is no more rebellion in grief, with the cross no more despair; for it shows us heaven through our tears. And when we bear it bravely, may we not say that we are consoling the Heart of Jesus, that we spare Him, in our own case, the grief caused Him by the unavailingness of His Passion to so many souls, who refuse to profit by it; and thus we take from Him something of His heavy burden, like that man of Cyrene, who, passing on the road to Calvary, had the wonderful honour of bearing on his shoulder one end of the cross of our Saviour.

Let us love the cross. And when in the country, at the entrance of the villages, at the corners of the roads, and at the end of the fields, we perceive this sign of our salvation, let us hail it devoutly.

* "Pacifcans per sanguinem crucis ejus, sive que in terris sive quæ in cælis sunt."—Coloss. i. 20.

Let us rejoice to meet it often on our way. Let us raise again those crosses which our fathers planted, and when a little trouble would prevent them falling, let us not refuse this work to our Saviour Jesus, of whom they speak to us. In a land where the cross is often seen, the traveller at every step is recalled to good thoughts, just as the witness of a devout life is himself incited to good. And thus everything is in harmony outside our earthly dwellings, as well as in our souls. And as our God in His liberality has adorned for us with so much beauty the fields, the woods, and the mountains, we, in spite of our weakness, shall have added to this beautiful nature an austere and touching ornament, which will clothe it in the livery of our Saviour.

Let us love the cross. Let us put this holy sign in all our homes, and over the cradles of our children; and, above all, let it be received into the depths of our hearts, at the same time that it hangs on our walls. Let a glance towards that cross temper all our joys, silence all our complaints, and awaken all our hopes; and in evil days, when we are weary with

suffering, let us raise ourselves by this thought, that it is the cross of Jesus, that wounds our shoulder, and that we are bearing it with Him along the way that leads to heaven. The devout author of the "Following" says: "If thou carry the cross willingly it will carry thee, and bring thee to the desired end, namely, to that place where there will be an end of suffering, though here there will be no end. If thou carry it unwillingly, thou makest it a burden to thee, and loadest thyself the more, and nevertheless thou must bear it.....For even our Lord Jesus Christ Himself was not for one hour of His life without the anguish of His Passion. 'It behoved,' said He, 'that Christ should suffer, and rise from the dead, and so enter into His glory.' How then dost thou seek another way than this royal way, which is the way of the holy cross?"*

* Following of Christ, bk. ii. 12.

Prayer.

O holy Virgin Mary, thou whom the Church at once calls Our Lady of Sorrows and Our Lady of Mercy, in whom the sufferings of the Passion have opened an inexhaustible source of mercy, even for those whose salvation has cost thee so dear, give us a deep sympathy for thy sorrows, and have mercy on our ingratitude. Ask of thy divine Son that all our crosses may appear to us light in comparison with His ; that we may bear them willingly in order to follow thee on the way to Calvary, and that, pondering on that cross which was the salvation of the world, we may look upon our crosses as instruments of salvation, and means of following our Redeemer. O holy Mother, obtain for us the courage to follow thy footsteps closely, and not basely to fly from thee in sorrow, since we aspire to be with thee in glory ; to draw from the remembrance of thy sufferings a just appreciation of our own, and that resignation which softens them on earth, by rendering them meritorious in heaven.

Practice.

To love the holy exercise of the way of the cross ; and to meditate while performing it on the sorrows of Jesus and Mary, with a firm desire of accepting our sufferings for the love of them.

TWENTY-SEVENTH DAY.

MARY AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS.

"Woman, behold thy Son. Son, behold Thy Mother."—St. John, xix. 26.

We have seen the meeting between the Mother of sorrows and her Divine Son. When she had seen His Divine Majesty weighed down beneath the burden of the cross, and the King of heaven and earth forced to rise again amid insults, and dragged along the road to Golgotha like an ordinary criminal, she continued on her way, supported by a supernatural power. She was the first to reach Calvary, and there stood waiting.*

* "Having reached before her Son the cruel mountain on which He was to be crucified, from its summit she saw Him surrounded by executioners and soldiers, who were pushing Him, dragging Him, and trampling Him under their feet; she saw Him crowned with thorns, His holy Face disfigured by the blood with which it was clotted, staggering under the immense weight of His cross, and gaining with great difficulty the steep summit of Calvary."—P. Ventura, *Les Saintes Femmes de l'Évangile*, p. 364.

In the mean time, the confused sound of the cries and curses of the crowd grows louder, and strikes upon the Mother's heart. They draw near; Mary turns not away her eyes. The Divine Victim is in the hands of the executioners; they tear off His garments which stick to the bleeding wounds caused by the scourging; the cross is laid on the ground. Ah! holy Mother, this is a harder bed than the crib of Bethlehem in which thine arms laid Him three-and-thirty years ago!

He gives Himself into the hands of His executioners with as much docility as a weary child whom his mother is gently preparing for his rest.* Mingling with the savage yells of the crowd are heard sobs and groans. The holy women who had come from Galilee with Jesus, had followed Him on the road to Calvary, and now, grouped around Mary, or kneeling with Magdalen, they cover their faces that they may not see the horrors of the sacrifice; but Mary stands, neither weeping nor lamenting, she is as silent as her Son. Stretching out her arms, as if to bless this

* The Foot of the Cross. F. Faber.

timid flock, she seems to be numbering them with her looks; Mother, is that joy shining in thine eyes? Not one of them, at least, has abandoned her master.

What means this? Whence comes it that the weak are to be found on Calvary, and that the strong have fled? Is it not the beginning of a great mystery? We see the holy women, faithful to Jesus even unto death, gathering and standing round His cross, and the reason is evident. Since the fall of her first mother, woman had suffered under a more severe condemnation, and had fallen to a position far lower than that of man; it was only on Calvary to which she brought the tribute of her contrite tears, that she was restored to the position since held by all Christian women. And if Mary appears so great in the supernatural courage which kept her alive amongst all the horrors of the Passion, it is because God had appointed her place on the altar of sacrifice; and, as she took part in the mystery of the Incarnation, by giving to God made man, flesh of her flesh and blood from her veins, so also she partook in the mystery of the Redemption by suffering with the Re-

deemer, and by consenting to the death of her Son for the salvation of men.

On the very spot on which the new Adam is about to die, the new Eve stands before us. Behold the woman promised to our first parents by our outraged God, who even in the hour of His wrath was not forgetful of His mercy.† This is the woman whom God showed beforehand to the serpent, the conqueror of Eve, as his eternal and victorious foe, when He said : “ I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed ; she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel.” “ Now, none of you are ignorant,” said the great St. Augustin more than fourteen hundred years ago, to the catechumens whom he was instructing, “ that this serpent is the devil, and that this woman is the Virgin Mary.”* Neither are

* “ Cum iratus fueris, misericordiæ recordeberis.” (Habac. iii. 2.) The whole of this chapter is drawn either from the Homily of P. Ventura, *Maria au pied de la Croix*, or, *Marie Mere de l'Eglise*, or from the work of which this homily is the abridgment: *La Mere de Dieu Mere des Hommes*.

† Draconem illum diabolum esse, mulierum vero illam Virginem Mariam significasse nullus vestrum ignorat. (*Ad Catechum.* lib. iv. 1.)

we ignorant of it, for there is no change in the teaching of the Catholic Church. Mary, in truth it was, who, being without sin in her conception, triumphed from the first moment of her birth over all the wiles and assaults of the devil, and crushed his head, and from that moment all men became her children. And Mary, who, by becoming the mother of Jesus Christ, from whom is born the great family of Christians, became also the head of a holy and divine seed, the seed of Jesus Christ, which is ever at war with the wicked and diabolical seed of the serpent.*

“Remember,” says the great preacher from whom I have taken the whole of this chapter, “that the ruin of Eden was repaired on Calvary alone, and that the mysteries which are accomplished on Calvary are but the results of the circumstances which accompanied the sin of Eden.” The tree of the cross was raised above guilty Jerusalem, and as it were in the midst of the Jewish synagogue only because the tree of the knowledge of good and evil stood in the midst of the terrestrial paradise. The Second Adam stretched

* Le P. Ventura.

out His obedient arms on the cross, and was fastened to it by cruel nails, only because the first Adam had stretched out his sacrilegious and rebellious arms to the forbidden tree, and had remained fastened to it by his unlawful desires. "And as a guilty woman took a share in Adam's sin for our ruin, so also did a woman without sin take a share in the sufferings of Jesus for our salvation. Thus does Eve at the foot of the tree give us the explanation of Mary at the foot of the cross."*

Let us continue our sorrowful account. The dying voice of our Saviour will confirm this truth and develop it in a wonderful way, by Himself giving Mary to be a Mother to all who are regenerated through His Blood.

The crime of the Jews was accomplished; the holy Mother saw her Son fastened to the cross. Each nail, each blow of the hammer which tore the flesh of Christ, struck and tore her soul.† The wounds in every separate part of the body of her Son were brought together in

* Le P. Ventura, *Marie au pied de la Croix*.

† "Quot clavi quot istus, Christi carnem rumpentes totidem Mariæ animam verberantes."—St. Jerome.

her heart.* She heard that beloved voice say in the midst of the blows and curses of the executioners: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." She saw the cross raised, and the Divine Mediator hanging between heaven and earth. The soldiers were dividing amongst themselves those garments which she had woven with her own hands, during so many industrious hours. The passers by blasphemed, and cried out, wagging their heads: "Vah, Thou that destroyest the temple of God, and in three days dost rebuild it, save Thy own self: if Thou be the Son of God come down from the cross." The doctors of the law and the Pharisees mocked and rejoiced among themselves. "Let Him now come down from the cross," said they, "and we will believe in Him." Each one of these blasphemies was a new wound for the heart of Mary. Meanwhile, above the earth, in that region in which, by the crime of man, the Mediator was hanging, another scene was going on. One of the two thieves who, in mockery of Jesus, were crucified

* "*Singula vulnera per ejus corpus dispersa in uno Mariæ corde sunt congregata.*"—St. Bonaventure.

on either side of Him, was blaspheming and setting before us the awful picture of an impenitent sinner. The other, the first guilty soul redeemed by His precious blood, said humbly, "Lord, remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Amen, I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in paradise." These words fell like dew on the heart of Mary, thirsting to hear the voice of Jesus, thirsting for the salvation of men, for whom, with her will ever perfectly united to that of God, she consented to sacrifice her Son. Doubtless, her prayer was united to the prayer of the penitent sinner, for then it was that the eyes of Jesus, turning with difficulty towards the earth, seemed to seek the Mother who was suffering for sinners in her soul all that He was suffering in His body.* He saw her standing at the foot of His cross, generous in her sacrifice, though her soul was flooded with sorrow never equalled, and thinking at the same time of her and of us, He pronounced those wonderful words by which, while provid-

* Quod Christus in corpore beata Virgo in corde suo perpressa est.—St. Bernard.

ing for His Mother a son to console the remaining years of her life on earth, He declared her for ever our Mother, and the Mother of all men.

The holy Gospel tells us that "when Jesus therefore had seen His Mother and the disciple standing whom He loved, He saith to His Mother: Woman, behold thy son. After that He saith to the disciple: Behold thy Mother. And from that hour the disciple took her to his own."*

We cannot doubt that in uttering these words our divine Saviour had first and chiefly in His mind His Mother and His beloved disciple. In thinking thus specially of Mary at the solemn hour of redemption, it was His will to shew us how truly she was His Mother, how truly He had become her Son when He was made man, and to recommend to us from the cross, as from a pulpit, the great precept of filial love. By giving her as a Mother to St. John, He bequeathed to the purest, tenderest, and most faithful of His disciples, her who was, after Jesus had ascended into heaven, the greatest and

* John xix. 26, 27.

most holy of all beings left on earth, the living temple in which had dwelt the Word made Flesh. "Happy John," exclaims the author whom I have taken for a guide, "thou hast had the courage, the constancy, and the generosity, to follow Jesus to the last, and to remain near His cross. These virtues, so noble and so pure, have merited for thee the honour of being chosen as a brother by Jesus Christ, and of being given to His own Mother as a son in His place. Such is the happiness of one who presses close to the cross, who is the companion of the Crucified, and who contemplates on Calvary the mysteries of the Son and the sorrows of the Mother. By this road is reached not only the love of Jesus, but also the most intimate friendship and the most close relationship with Him."

But there is yet another meaning in these words of our divine Saviour: "Woman, behold thy son; son, behold thy mother." A still deeper and higher meaning. At the very moment in which the mystery of Redemption was being fulfilled, the Holy Victim Who was sacrificing Himself for the salvation of all, would not allow so

much as a thought which did not contribute to His sacrifice. God so loved the world as to give to it His Only-Begotten Son; the Son, by a full consent to the will of His Father, and by an equal love, has offered Himself of His own will. He has become ours. There does not remain to Him a single feeling or will which is not our common property. Thus, while offering His limbs to the cruel nails, He prays to His Father for His murderers; it is not only for the murderers on Calvary that He prays, but for all sinners, whose sins have occasioned His death. When He promises to the penitent thief a place in the kingdom of heaven, He addresses His promise and pardon to all penitent souls. In the same way, when He casts down His eyes upon His Mother and the beloved disciple, He sees in Mary not only the holy Mother who bore Him in her womb, and fed Him in His Childhood, but also the Mother of all the living, the sharer of His sacrifice, the new Eve, who by suffering expiates the sin of the first Eve. In His beloved disciple He sees all the other disciples to whom He has promised that He will not leave them

orphans; He sees the Infant Church and all the souls to whom His death will bring life. The tears of His disciple remind Him of all the tears which will be shed in the course of ages by the disciples of the cross; His Heart is moved with pity and He gives to the great Christian family a Mother, His own Mother!

Let us fall on our knees and thank our Saviour, for, after the gift of His Blood, what could He give us more precious than His Mother? What is sweeter or more consoling on earth than the tenderness of a mother's heart? Which of us, in the most cruel sufferings, has not felt his heart opened, and the weight which stifled him relieved, if he has been suffered to weep on his mother's breast? And yet, what is the tenderness of an earthly mother compared to the tenderness of Mary?

Let us see when it is that this peerless Mother adopts us as her children. Her only Son, her well beloved is there, hanging upon the cross, disfigured and dying. If there is amongst us a mother who has seen her child suffer and die, she will know something of the grief of Mary.

This is the height of human suffering, but Mary has surpassed it. For the horror of sacrilege is added to it, and He whom she saw suffering and dying was not only her Son, but her God.

It is at this dreadful moment, when the hearts of human mothers are shut to consolation, like that of Rachel weeping in Rama, that the dying voice of her Son gives her as children those for whom, and on account of whom He is about to die. "Woman, behold thy son." He no longer calls her His Mother, and for a son He gives her not only the faithful disciple, but every member of the Christian family, in which, alas, all will not be found faithful. Does Mary reject these stranger children, whom Jesus seems to bequeath to her in His place? No; for these sons are no longer strangers to her heart. United to the Heart and to the Will of Jesus, like Him she desires the salvation of all men. United to His sufferings, she contemplates with eyes of love those wounds from which was flowing the salvation of man.*

* "Piis oculis spectabat filii vulnera ex quibus sciebat redemptionem hominibus futuram."—St. Ambrose.

True Mother of the living, she willingly accepts as sons those to whom the death of her Son is about to give life.

Let us love her, for she willingly accepted her painful Maternity on Calvary, as she had willingly accepted her glorious maternity, announced to her by the Angel at Nazareth. Let us love her, for never did a mother suffer for her children what Mary has suffered for us.

“It was almost the sixth hour,” the holy Gospel tells us, “and there was darkness over all the earth till the ninth hour.” The sixth hour was the middle of the day, but the sun appeared to hide itself for fear at the crime of the Jews. The curses of the crowd, the murderers of their God, became less loud. In the silence which gradually deepened with this frightful night, the only sound to be heard was from time to time a voice of insult from some Pharisee. Suddenly a cry was heard from the cross: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?—Eli, Eli, lamma sabacthani?”* What a

* Not that His Father had forsaken Him; but that He was troubled as if His Father had really forsaken Him.

mystery is this ! The Son of God appears to call in vain upon His Father, and heaven and earth seem alike to refuse Him pity. And Mary still stands at the foot of the cross. While the sun hides its face, and mourning nature seems to weep for its Author, Mary remains a silent spectator of the sufferings of her Son. She sacrifices her maternal love to her obedience to God, and when the loud cry of anguish rends her soul, when for the love of man God seems to forsake His Son, she also consents for the love of man, to the death of this beloved Son.

O holy victim ! how does she suffer with the Son whom she sacrifices for us ! Shall she not at least obtain the salvation which was so dearly bought ?

“Afterwards,” the holy Gospel tells us, “Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said : I thirst.”

What is this thirst, which can draw forth a complaint from our Saviour, after so many tortures ? Mary understood it well. Doubtless she would have given her life to moisten those dying lips, but she knew that the thirst of Jesus was,

above all; for our souls. She shared His suffering over the loss of so many guilty ones for, whom the Blood of Jesus will have been shed in vain, who will not know this source of living water which flows to eternal life. Jesus thirsts for the salvation of souls; will no one come to quench His thirst? "Now there was a vessel set there full of vinegar. And they, putting a sponge full of vinegar about a hyssop, put it to His mouth."

O holy Mother, will His sacrifice and thine call forth nothing but ingratitude?

"Jesus, therefore, when He had taken the vinegar, said: It is consummated." And, "crying with a loud voice, said: Father, into Thy Hands I commend My Spirit." And, bowing His Head, He gave up the ghost."

"And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top even to the bottom, and the earth quaked, and the rocks were rent.....Now the centurion and they that were with him watching Jesus, having seen the earthquake, and the things that were done were sore afraid, saying: Indeed this was the Son of God."

And in the midst of the holy women lying prostrate on the ground, stood Mary at the foot of the Cross, where she had received the last look of her Son.

Prayer.

O holy Mother of the Divine Victim, merciful Mother of the guilty ones, whose sins have crucified Him, open to us thine arms at the foot of that cross from which the dying Jesus bequeathed thee to us. Give us a place at the foot of that saving tree near John and Magdalen; for the cross is the support and safeguard of the good, and the refuge of sinners. Obtain for us by thy holy prayers that we may not be of the number of those unhappy ones for whom the Blood of Jesus has been shed in vain, who offer nothing but vinegar to His lips, and ingratitude to His Heart. May our souls, washed ever since our baptism in the Blood of the Lamb, purified after each one of our falls by a sincere repentance and the merits of His adorable Blood, appear one day clothed in innocence before their Saviour,

when He shall come to judge the living and the dead. O holy Mother, whose spotless soul bore the impression of each of the wounds of our Saviour, work in us a like miracle. Impress deeply on our guilty souls the wounds of thy crucified Son.

Make us shed holy tears with thee, and suffer with our Saviour all the days of our lives.

All my desire, O holy Mother, during this earthly life, is to remain with thee at the foot of the cross, and to unite myself to thy tears.

Reject me not. Permit me to weep with thee; make me bear the cross of my Saviour. Give me a share in His sufferings, wound me with His wounds, inebriate me with the love of His cross.

But on that awful day when my Saviour will become my Judge, be thou my defence, O holy Virgin, that I may not fall a prey to everlasting flames.

My God, when mine hour shall come to quit this earthly exile, grant that, with the help of Thy holy Mother, I may attain to the glory of Thine elect.

When my body returns to dust, deign

to receive my soul into the glory of paradise. Amen.

Practice.

To love to read or sing the “Stabat Mater.” To meditate carefully on the words, uniting ourselves to Mary at the foot of the Cross.

TWENTY-EIGHTH DAY.

JESUS LAID IN THE TOMB.

“O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to My sorrow.”—Lam. i. 12.

Christ was put to death, indeed, in the flesh, but enlivened in the spirit. In which also coming He preached to those spirits that were in prison.*

The sun, having enlightened and warmed us throughout the day, disappears beneath the horizon, and we are left in darkness. It then sheds its life-giving rays on other regions, each in its turn, until dawn appears once more, and the sun returns to rejoice our eyes. In the like manner, when the Divine Sun of Justice disappeared for a time beneath the horizon of Calvary, when the Body of the Holy One remained hanging on the altar on which it

* “Christus.....mortificatus quidem carne, vivificatus autem spiritu, in quo et his qui in carcere erant spiritibus veniens prædicavit.”—1 Peter, iii. 18, 19.

had been sacrificed for sinners,* His soul, living and glorious, descended with incomparable majesty into that region in which, from the beginning of the world, the just who had spent in holiness this mortal life of trial, were expecting their deliverance. Whilst a double darkness covered the earth, the beautiful Easter day dawned in Limbus, hailed by the acclamations of all the saints of the old law. What joy is here ! On earth, few grateful souls were found to receive the good news, but with what transports it is greeted here ! How magnificent the alleluia with which that Easter hymn began ! Of this we can form some notion, if we think of what must have been the sufferings of those holy souls who knew God, who loved Him alone, and who had been pining after Him, some of them for no less than four thousand years. Think of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, greeting their Redeemer, who had sprung from their own race, and had been expected during so many centuries ; Moses and the prophets rejoicing at the sight of Him whom they

* *Justus pro injustis.*

had announced, David recognizing his God in his son! What brightness and joy was there to be found in that mournful place, in which they had so long waited for the Deliverer, and suffered the privation of the sight of God, a bitter privation for holy souls, even with the hope of one day seeing Him.

But, on earth all was darkness; the living Jesus was no longer there, and the risen Jesus had not yet come. The Body of the Victim still hung on the cross.

Now, as it was the eve of the pasch, the pharisees came to find the governor. The letter of the law forbade them to leave so dreadful a sight before the eyes of the people, on the day consecrated to the Lord, and the scruples of the pharisees clung to the letter of the law, though they did not prevent them from crucifying the innocent. They therefore begged Pilate that the legs of the condemned might be broken, according to the custom, to complete their punishment, and that their bodies might be buried before the Sabbath Day. The weak governor sent soldiers who broke the legs of the thieves, but, coming to Jesus, and finding Him already dead, they did not

break His legs. But one of them pierced His side with his spear, and immediately there came forth water and blood.

Thus was accomplished in the true paschal Lamb, that command which God had formerly given for the typical lamb: "You shall not break a bone of him;"* and that other word which He spoke by His prophet Zacharias: "They shall look on Him whom they pierced."† These circumstances have been thus minutely detailed to us by the evangelist who was on the spot, a sorrowful spectator at the foot of his Master's Cross.

By the side of John we see our holy Mother. These long hours found her standing, her eyes fixed on Jesus crucified. She was doubtless continuing the last prayer of her Son, and interceding with God for sinners, when that rough soldier, who had just pierced the Divine Body, found his salvation through the blood which spung upon him, and immediately became the disciple of the crucified, whose sentence He had come to complete. The rude Pagan was transformed into a faithful

* Exodus, xii. 46.

† Zach. xii. 10.

Christian, and he who caused to flow from the Heart of Jesus the last drops of blood shed for men, afterwards himself gave his blood for Him. He has his place among the glorious assembly of martyrs, and the Church honours him on the fifteenth of March, under the name of St. Longinus.

Meanwhile, a just man of Arimathea, a member of the council of the Jews, but innocent of their crime, who in secret waited for the kingdom of God, went boldly to find Pilate, and asked of him the Body of Jesus. Pilate, surprised that He was so soon dead, sent for the centurion, and asked him if the Holy Victim had already given up the ghost. On his reply, he gave the Body to Joseph.

Nicodemus, a timid disciple, who at the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, had gone to seek Him at night, hiding his faith for fear of the Jews, came with Joseph to Mount Calvary, bringing perfumes. The Blood of their Saviour had already given them the courage to brave His murderers. They unfastened the Divine Body with reverence from the cross, and laid It in the arms of His holy Mother. Who can say what she then suffered; her

Son, her God, lay dead in her arms. Doubtless the prophet had seen her thus contemplating the disfigured Body of Jesus, when he put in her mouth the words: "O, all ye that pass by the way attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow!"*

This sad picture, which so many holy souls have contemplated in their meditations, which so many artists of all ages have striven to reproduce, and to the grandeur and desolation of which no human understanding has ever succeeded in doing justice, will cause devout tears to be shed as long as there are devout hearts on the earth. Let us often contemplate it, and, with our Saviour, love the Mother who has suffered so much for us.

When the cruel crown had been removed from the torn brow of Jesus, when each one of His wounds had been devoutly washed and watered with tears, Joseph and Nicodemus wrapped the Sacred Body in cloths with aromatic spices, as the Jews were accustomed to bury their dead. There was in the place where He was crucified a garden, and in this garden a new

* Lamentations, i. 12.

sepulchre hewn out of the rock ; this sepulchre belonged to Joseph, and no man had as yet been laid therein. They made haste, therefore, to lay Jesus in it, for it was close by, and they were obliged to bury the Sacred Body before the Sabbath, which would begin at sunset. Then, having both together rolled a large stone to the mouth of the sepulchre, they retired. The day before the Pasch was drawing to a close, and the first stars of the Sabbath began to shine forth.*

Then did our holy Mother feel with a threefold bitterness that desolation which we experience when all that remains of those for whom we weep on earth is covered from our eyes. The very Body of Jesus was taken from her, and she was left alone on the earth. But the son whom her dying Son had given to her humbly approached her. He placed his Mother's feeble arm within his own, and in the silence of the falling night he dutifully supported her steps down the slope of Mount Calvary. She saw once more the Way of Sorrows, which had been

* The Hebrews reckon their days from one evening to another. *Histoire de J. C.*, by M. Foisset.

trodden on the morning of that terrible day, and the spot where she had seen Jesus fall under the weight of His cross. She saw again Jerusalem, over which her Son had wept, and the thought of the punishment which was hanging over the guilty city was doubtless a fresh sorrow to the daughter of David. At last the house of John, the first of her earthly sons, offered its shelter to the Mother of Sorrows. St. Bonaventure gives us a glimpse of the touching mysteries which were witnessed by this humble house on the morning of the following day. St. Peter humbly knocking at the door, and, at Mary's voice, entering with downcast eyes, sighing deeply and shedding tears, and Mary, the holy women, and the faithful disciple, "weeping with him and unable to speak, so great was their sorrow."* All the disciples coming one after the other to assemble round their Mother, who strengthens and consoles them. Then, in the evening, after sunset, the holy women going out into the town to buy spices, that they may go at daybreak to embalm

* Meditations sur la Vie de Notre Seigneur.

the body of their beloved Saviour. Now, during this same day, "the chief priests and the Pharisees came together to Pilate, saying : Sir, we remember that that seducer said, while He was yet alive : After three days I will rise again. Command, therefore, the sepulchre to be guarded until the third day, lest, perhaps, His disciples come and steal Him away, and say to the people : He is risen from the dead ; and the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said to them : You have a guard ; go, guard it as you know. And they, departing, made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting guards."*

Fools that they were, their guards became witnesses to see and tell of the wonders of the Lord. Here let us pause, at the moment when the shades of this second night are falling on the earth. In a few hours the dawn of the Easter morning will break ; the bonds of the sepulchre will be broken, and the Conqueror of death will arise in splendour from the darkness beneath which He has hidden His glory. The just

* St. Matthew xxvii.

of the old law are singing in limbus the Alleluia of their deliverance; heaven opens to receive them, and in a short time both good and wicked on earth will acknowledge Jesus risen.

From this darkness, which was so closely followed by the bright day of the Resurrection, let us learn to hope and to believe, when in an hour of deep grief we seem to have lost all. Let us then think of the soul of the Blessed Virgin Mary, when she had left the tomb of her Divine Son, and when, in the dwelling of her adopted son, she saw weeping around her the little flock whose Shepherd had been stricken. God had asked of her the sacrifice of her only begotten Son; she, like Abraham, had offered Him willingly, but her obedience had been proved even unto the end. She had drunk to the dregs the chalice of the sufferings of Jesus; was there ever sorrow like unto her sorrow? She had seen the Son of God die; was there ever a trial of faith like unto this trial? And yet Mary's Faith was as perfect as her obedience. She controls her boundless grief, she is the comfort of hearts less wounded than her own, and

remembering the words of her Son, she hopes against all human hope.

When our hearts fail us, when our dearest affections are laid in the tomb, let us not weep without hope. Let us think of Mary, firm in hope, even when her Son and her God was buried as though He were a mere son of Adam.

A glorious resurrection and eternal happiness awaits every Christian soul after death, and it is not in vain that our Redeemer has destroyed its empire.

Prayer.

O Mary, whom our fathers have often called our Lady of hope, teach us to hope as thou hast taught us to suffer. Obtain for us, together with a prompt obedience, an invincible faith, which looks on beyond this earth and its sorrows. Teach us how to bury our earthly affections and desires in our Saviour's tomb, so that we may rise through Him to the hope of eternal joys, while waiting to receive their realization through His grace. Mother of Sorrows, comforter of the afflicted, teach us to find comfort in our troubles, by lessening those

of our brethren. May we see through the darkness of this mortal life, the ever brightening dawn of the resurrection. Amen.

Practice.

Often to repeat, while comparing our sorrows to those of Mary, "Was there ever sorrow like unto her sorrow?" To accept them in gratitude for those she has suffered for us. To expect with confidence the consolations which God ever gives to His obedient servants either on earth or in heaven.

TWENTY-NINTH DAY.

RESURRECTION.

“Rejoice, O Queen of heaven, He is risen as He said. Alleluia.”—Antiphon for Easter Day.

“After the Sabbath, when it began to dawn towards the next day, which was the first day of the week, behold there was a great earthquake.

“An angel of the Lord descended from heaven and rolled back the stone from the sepulchre, and sat upon it: and his countenance was as lightning, and his raiment as snow. And for fear of him, the guards were struck with terror and became as dead men. And the graves were opened: and many bodies of the saints that had slept arose and came out of their tombs, and came into the holy city, and appeared to many.”*

Alleluia! Behold the great day is beginning, the great day of the Resurrection

* *Histoire de Jesus Christ*, par M. Foisset.

which is to enlighten the elect of God on the earth, as long as the earth shall last, until it gives place to the great day of their ascension into heaven.

Our Saviour is come back, come back to leave us no more; even when He goes to His Father, His light will continue to enlighten us; even in our exile the Shepherd will be ever with His flock, invisible, but living: His faithful sheep will ever know where to find Him, and henceforth if we shut our eyes to the light which that Easter day has brought us, we must needs be either senseless or faithless.

At the earliest dawn of this great day, the earth trembled, the angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled away the stone from the sepulchre, and sat upon it. The bonds of death were unable to hold the Son of the Eternal God; and who are the first witnesses of these tremendous mysteries? Not the friends of the Crucified, whose interest it would have been to proclaim His resurrection, but the guards, no doubt well chosen by the Pharisees, who were thunderstruck at the sight of the angel, and whom, when they came to themselves, only recovered to fly to make

known the strange news to their masters. Who could deny their testimony, or doubt the dread felt throughout guilty Jerusalem, when the earth shook to its foundations, the graves of the saints opened, and their liberated souls came to announce to the living the resurrection of the Saviour? The Jews could only oppose to such miracles the most miserable lies. Infidels of all ages being unable to discuss them, have passed them over in silence or simply denied them.—In order to believe, we must merit the gift of Faith. The heart must be opened to the truth, before the understanding, and this alone explains why the great light of the resurrection shone into so few souls. When in the days of the captivity of Israel, Pharaoh and his people had filled up the measure of their iniquities, before sending among them the destroying angel, God covered the whole land of Egypt with thick darkness; and the land of Gessen alone in which dwelt the children of Israel, was gladdened by the light of heaven.

So is it with the light of Faith. God gives it to those who, having an upright heart and corresponding to the inspira-

tions of grace, shew themselves worthy of it, while darkness is the well-deserved punishment of the unbeliever.

Let us now continue the account of this great day; we shall see that even earnest souls receive Faith and understanding from God alone. Mary Magdalen, and Mary the mother of James and Salome, had, as we have seen, brought spices to embalm the Body of Jesus. They started separately and very early in the morning.

Mary Magdalen reached the sepulchre before the others, while it was yet dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away; so without entering in, she ran to Simon Peter and that other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them: "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid Him." Peter went out immediately with that other disciple, and they both ran to the sepulchre. John, who was younger than Peter, and who ran more quickly, came first to the sepulchre, and when he stooped down, he saw the linen cloths lying, but yet he went not in. Peter, who had followed him closely, went into the sepulchre, and saw the linen

cloths lying; and the napkin which had been about the Head of Jesus, wrapped up and lying apart. Then John also went in; he saw and believed that He had been taken away, not that He was risen; for as he says himself, the apostles did not as yet understand the scriptures; they did not understand that Jesus must rise again from the dead. They therefore departed again to their home, Peter wondering at what had happened.

Mary Magdalen had returned to the sepulchre with Peter and John. She could not leave the place, and she stood outside the sepulchre weeping.

All of a sudden she stooped down and looked into the sepulchre: and she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet where the Body of Jesus had been laid. One of these angels said to her, Woman, why weepest thou? She cried out once more in her sorrow: Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him. After these words, seeing nothing, and thinking of nothing save that the Body of Jesus was not there, not even noticing that they were angels who were

speaking to her, she turned on the other side to see if they had not hidden the Body of Jesus in any other place, till they could carry Him away more conveniently. Then she saw through the trees a man whom she knew not. This man said to her, Woman, why weepest thou? She thought that it was the gardener; and with the same thought still in her mind, she said: Sir, if thou hast taken Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away. Jesus (for it was He who was speaking to her,) said to her with that voice she knew so well: Mary. She recognized His voice, and immediately forgetting the crucifixion, His death and His burial, she turned quickly towards Him, and cried out as of old: Rabboni, Master.*

Now Mary recognized Him, for Jesus had spoken. In a transport of unspeakable joy she prostrated herself before her Lord, and clung around His feet. He had been lost to her, and now was found. She feared lest if she let Him go, her Saviour would again disappear. Jesus spoke to

* *Histoire de Jesus Christ*, par M. Foisset.

her as a father who smiles at the vehemence of his child : " Do not touch Me, for I am not yet ascended to My Father." Thus He promised to His servant that she should see Him yet a few days on the earth ; then He sent her to bear to the apostles the good tidings of His resurrection. Mary Magdalen hastened to the disciples whom she found in tears : " I have seen the Lord," she cried out, " and these things He said to me. I am not yet ascended to My Father, but go to My brethren and say to them : I ascend to My Father and to your Father, to My God and your God." But in vain did she tell them that Jesus was living, and that she had seen Him, they did not believe her.

In the meantime, Mary mother of James and Salome, with Joanna the wife of Chusa, and other holy women of Galilee, who had ministered to Jesus, came in their turn to the sepulchre, the sun being already risen. And as they walked they said one to another, Who shall roll us back the stone from the door of the sepulchre ? But when they drew near they saw that the stone was rolled back. For it was very great. And going in, they found not

the Body of the Lord Jesus. And as they were astonished in their minds at this, behold two men stood by them in shining apparel, and as they were afraid and bowed down their countenance towards the ground, one of them said to them: Be not affrighted, you seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. Why seek you the living among the dead? He is not here, He is risen as He said. Remember how He spoke unto you, when He was yet in Galilee, saying: The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. Come and see the place where the Lord was laid. Go and tell His disciples and Peter that He is risen: and behold He will go before you into Galilee, there you shall see Him, as He told you. Then they remembered the words of Jesus. And they went out of the sepulchre with fear and great joy, running to tell His disciples. And on the road they said nothing to any man, for a trembling and fear had seized them. And behold Jesus met them, saying: All hail. Immediately they came up and took hold of His Feet, and adored Him. Then Jesus said

to them: Fear not: go tell My brethren that they go into Galilee, there they shall see me. And going back from the sepulchre they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest, and Magdalen also. And these words seemed to them as idle tales: and they believed them not.*

We have seen that the words of the angel left a great fear in the souls of these holy women, and uncertainty was mixed with their joy, until the beloved voice of Jesus spoke that joyful word: *Avete*. All hail! Jesus greets His servants before they greet their Master. How often is it still the same! The mere knowledge of the truth would lead but few souls to God, if in God's own good time they did not hear within them that voice of sweetness, power, and tenderness, the voice of Jesus.

But once more, in order to hear the voice of Jesus, the ears of our heart must be opened, and we must correspond to the first movements of grace. The holy women found their Master in the way, because they had been with devotion to His tomb; and Faith is a gift of God which

* *Histoire de Jesus Christ*, par M. Foisset.

none can possess without His grace, but which He grants above all to souls of good will.

But whilst the holy women are returning so full of joy and from henceforth so strong in faith, where is the holy mother of the Risen Jesus? Why was she not there to recognize her Son before Magdalen? Why was she not there to animate the wavering faith of the disciples? How comes it that the Gospel does not mention her first on this day of joy, as it did on the days of sorrow?

Let us not complain; everything in the Gospel is eloquent, even its silence, and we shall see that this silence sings the praises of our mother better than any canticle. Let us consider once more the account we have just read, and compare what passed in Mary's soul on this great Easter morning with what passed in the hearts even of the most fervent of the first friends of Jesus.

What was the feeling which led Magdalen and her companions to the sepulchre in the early morning? The third day had dawned, and the Saviour had solemnly predicted that the third day would see His

glorious resurrection. Is it then the hope of this resurrection which guides them? No; for they carry in their hands precious spices, having no other desire or hope than that of honouring the death of their beloved Master. The stone being rolled back, and the guards having fled, suggest but one idea to Magdalen; they have taken away her Lord, and she goes in tears to tell His disciples. Peter and John run to the tomb and find it empty, and the cloths and the napkin laid on the ground. They also, like Magdalen, believe that He has been carried away, and return downcast. The very thought of the resurrection does not occur to them. Magdalen remains behind them, weeping and sighing near the sepulchre. The angels appear to her, but she is so blinded by her grief that she does not see in them the messengers of good tidings, and tells them with tears that they have carried away her Lord. Jesus Himself appears to her; she does not recognize Him, and cries out: "If thou hast taken Him away, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away." Nothing less than the voice of the Master Himself

could open this sorrowful heart to faith in His resurrection. He says to her: "Mary!" and then she throws herself on her knees, and clasps His Feet, which she once more covers with kisses and tears.

Her companions also, when they afterwards came to the sepulchre, did not recognize Him until greeted by His voice. The disciples, when they heard their message, thought that their joy proceeded from some dream of the imagination, and did not believe them.

When the two disciples met Jesus on the road to Emmaus they told Him their sorrow, and their disbelief in the women's account of the resurrection. In vain did that divine voice reply to them: "O foolish and slow of heart, ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and so enter into His glory?" They did not recognize Him until the breaking of the bread, when their Saviour opened their eyes by repeating the miracle of the Last Supper. Peter did not recognize his Master till He visited him in his sorrow. When He appeared in the midst of His disciples in the upper chamber, they were seized with fear, and took Him for a

spirit. When He shewed them His Hands and His Feet, pierced with the bleeding wounds of the Crucifixion, beside themselves with fear and joy, they did not believe till Jesus eat with them, and the miracle of the breaking of the bread opened their eyes, as it did those of the disciples of Emmaus. They are all alike; filled with love for Jesus, but a love that was full of fear, human, and as yet without understanding. St. Thomas was absent when our Saviour appeared in the midst of His disciples; his brethren announced to him the resurrection of the Saviour, but He refused to believe it: "Except I shall see in His Hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His Side, I will not believe. And after eight days, again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them. Jesus cometh, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said: Peace be to you. Then He said to Thomas: Put in thy finger hither, and see My Hands, and bring hither thy hand, and put it into My side; and be not faithless but believing. Thomas answered, and said to

Him : My Lord and My God. Jesus saith to him : Because thou hast seen, Thomas, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen and have believed."

Can we imagine that Mary's love and faith in any way resembled the love and faith of these slow of heart? Can we believe that it was necessary that Jesus should appear to her, as to Peter, Thomas, and Magdalen? No. Mary's soul was in a higher region, in which she saw her Son and held intercourse with Him; and as we have seen her standing at the foot of the cross, supported by an unconquerable faith, placed by her knowledge of the mystery of the Incarnation, and by her share in all the sufferings of her Son, far above the holy women and John, who only loved Jesus with a human love, so we find her here in the presence of her Son; and if He does not appear to her, as to the disciples, at appointed times, it is that He never ceases to be with her. How can we doubt that the first moments of this great day were for her; it was only just that the first at the foot of the cross should be the first in the glory of Easter day, and that

the voice of the risen Jesus should speak more tenderly and sweetly to the heart of His Mother than to Magdalen. But, as a devout author of our own time* says, "She was in the secret, and had no need that it should be explained to her." She saw with the eyes of the soul, she needed not to see with the eyes of a perishable body. St. Elizabeth, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, said: "Blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord." The Risen Lord seems to fulfil these wonderful words in praise of His Mother, when He says to the unbelieving disciple: "Blessed are they who have not seen, and have believed."

Yes, blessed are they who believe with Mary, who trust in the word of God, and place all their strength and all their hope in the Saviour who died on Calvary to expiate their sins, and who rose again to wait for them in His heavenly kingdom, and to conduct them thither by His grace. Blessed are they that believe and have

* M. Auguste Nicholas.

not seen, who, fastening themselves to the cross of Jesus, suffer with Him through the days of trial with a generous heart and without a doubt, confident that either on earth or in heaven the day of consolation will come, as the bright dawn of Easter Sunday comes after the mourning of Good Friday. "I know that my Redeemer liveth," said holy Job in the midst of his sufferings, "and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth." Let this certainty be our strength also. Let us seek Mary at the foot of the cross, that, like her, we may keep our faith in the midst of tears. Let us seek Mary after the resurrection, to rejoice with her, and to believe with her that our Redeemer liveth. Then one day, if we have been faithful, we also shall rise out of the earth, to join them in a life which will never end.

And as each year once more brings to us the beautiful feast of Easter, let us repeat with our whole hearts this joyful chant of the Church: "This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad therein." God loves our joy. Let us lay down the burden of our human sorrows and cares, and greet with joy this

great day. There are days of joy in families, and days of glory for nations, the memories of which are preserved, and which are celebrated with rejoicing as long as the nation or the family exist. Can there be on the earth an anniversary like to that of the resurrection of our Saviour, a greater day than Easter Sunday? It is the anniversary of the deliverance of the souls of all. In all families, and in all countries, let every voice cry, "Alleluia, Glory be to God. Glory to Jesus Risen." The country puts off its mourning clothing; the buds are everywhere opening; the fields and woods are bursting into new life; and under the green hedges, the primroses and daisies, to which our fathers have given names suggesting holy thoughts, are springing up.* Thus is the beautiful word Easter applied to the early flowers, that the resurrection of nature may remind us of the resurrection of our Saviour.

And shall not we also be born again, when everything is springing up afresh?

* The author here refers to the French name for early flowers, *Paquettes* or *Paquerettes*, taken from the French word for Easter.

And shall not we unite all the feelings of our hearts, and all the emotions of our souls, to those voices which seem to sing from all parts of the earth: Glory be to Jesus Risen! What must we do that we may take part in this great paschal joy? We must lay down the clothing of our sins as nature rises from a winding sheet of snow, and as the Risen Saviour leaves His winding sheet in the sepulchre. It was of this clothing that the apostle spoke, when he said to the first Christians at Ephesus: "Put off the old man, who is corrupted according to the desire of error, and put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth."*

The old man is man such as original sin has made him, corrupted by his evil desires, and the foolish errors of his mind. The new man is man such as the death and resurrection of our Saviour have made him. To put off the old man, and to put on the new man, is to cease from sin, and to lead the life of a Christian. It is to have made a confession of

* Ephes. iv. 22-24.

our sins, with the dispositions necessary for obtaining forgiveness, with a true and deep sorrow for having committed them, and a firm resolution not to fall into them again; it is to have done penance during the holy days of Lent fully and sincerely, that we may appear before God on Easter Day in festal garments with a soul purified by repentance and adorned with good desires, and full of joy at its resurrection.

And as a father gathers all his children round his table on days of joy, so will God receive all His children at this great feast, the paschal feast. There it is that the true Lamb is sacrificed, that it nourishes the true sons of Israel, and that Its Divine Blood marks them with the sign of the elect, and distinguishes them from the wicked. And though the munificence of our God daily renews this precious Feast, we know that it was on the eve of His Death, and on those great days of the Christian Passover, that this Feast was instituted by our Saviour, and that the Victim was sacrificed. We know that from these holy days every other day of rejoicing which God has given us is

counted. We know that when, through weakness of faith many Christians began to shrink from that holy table to which their fathers approached daily, the Church made the paschal communion a positive command, wishing that the Feast of Easter at least should unite, as the beautiful word *communion* implies, all the children of God at the table of their Father.

There are some Catholic countries in which the name of Easter is extended to all the great feasts of the year; they say the Easter of the Resurrection, Easter of the Holy Ghost, Easter of the Nativity, as we say : Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas, thus showing a great reverence for the word Easter.

Let us always feel a great reverence for this great day, and that it may be still more bright and joyous let us prepare ourselves for it long beforehand, if possible, the whole year. Let us die to all our evil inclinations, and rise again to holiness, then with what joy shall we sing the paschal Alleluia. But our true blessedness will be to raise our thoughts higher still to the Easter which shall never end, and to spend our lives in preparation for the

dawning of that Easter; that so on the day of our departure hence, we may be able to cry in the words of the Easter Anthem: "This is the day which the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad."

And now that we may share in the joy of the Holy Mother of Jesus, let us come to her with those words with which the Church greets her at the Easter season.

Prayer.

Rejoice, O Queen of Heaven, Alleluia.
For He whom thou wast meet to bear,
Alleluia.

Hath arisen as He promised, Alleluia.
Pray for us to God, Alleluia.

Practice.

To think often of Easter, as the anniversary of our deliverance, and of the resurrection of our Saviour as the pledge of our eternal resurrection. To resolve daily to put off the death of sin, and to rise to grace.

THIRTIETH DAY.

THE ASCENSION. MARY IN THE "UPPER
ROOM." PENTECOST.

"All these were persevering with one mind in prayer with the women, and Mary the Mother of Jesus, and with His brethren."—Acts i. 14.

The work of our redemption was accomplished, and the time was come, when our Saviour was about to leave the earth. But as a tender father, before leaving his children, gives them his last counsels, strengthens and consoles them, and sheds on the road on which they are entering the double light of his life and of his death, so our sweet Saviour constitutes the infant Church, and prepares her for the rude combats which await her. We have seen how much weakness still mingled with the love of the apostles for their Master, and with what difficulty they raised their drooping souls from the despair into which His bitter death had plunged them.

He appeared to them all several times, He spoke to them, He showed them His wounds, He rendered doubt impossible. On the dearly loved banks of the Lake of Tiberias, He renewed the prodigy of the miraculous draught of fishes. Then when Peter, Andrew, James and John, recognized Him and threw themselves at His feet, He again pointed out the head of the Church among those rude fishermen whom it was His will to make fishers of men. He said to St. Peter, "Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me more than these?" Peter humbly answered, "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." No longer now did he place himself above his brethren, and cry, "Although all should be scandalized in Thee, I will never be scandalized." Peter, through his sin and his repentance, had learnt the frailty of man and the sweetness of God's pardon. Peter no longer spoke in his own name, but in the name of the Lord, and henceforth his strength was to be immovable.

Jesus said to him: "Feed My lambs." But as Peter had thrice denied his Master, this tender Master desired to give him an occasion of confessing Him thrice. He

therefore said to him again : " Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me ?" Peter replied, " Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." And our Saviour said : " Feed My lambs." For the third time Jesus said to him : " Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me ?" Peter was grieved, and replied : " Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee." And Jesus said to him, " Feed My sheep."* This, then, is the shepherd given to our Saviour's flock in the place of the divine Shepherd, who is about to depart. Henceforth the sheep of His fold will never be without a guide. From the highest heaven, the Master will lead His servant who leads them.

But many dangers threaten this little flock. " I send you," our Saviour had formerly said, " as sheep in the midst of wolves." The chosen shepherds must then be animated by a new spirit, wisdom and understanding must open their minds in which so much darkness still resists the divine light, and must enlighten their hearts, once so slow to believe. A wis-

* St. John xxi. 15, 16, 17.

dom more than human must guide them in the midst of perils, that they may save, not the earthly life of the disciples of the Crucified, but the sacred trust of truth in the midst of this world filled with falsehoods. And lastly, the strength of God must send them unarmed against the powers of evil, and make them conquerors; the knowledge of God must render them more learned than all the doctors of earthly science. Piety must cause them to find sweetness in trials borne for God. The fear of the Lord must surpass and extinguish all human fears. We know that, wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord, are the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

Jesus consoling His disciples beforehand for His approaching death, said to them: "I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you for ever. The Spirit of Truth Whom the world cannot receive because it seeth Him not, nor knoweth Him. But you shall know Him, because He shall abide with you, and shall be in you."

The time being come, Jesus appeared

for the last time to His disciples assembled at Jerusalem. He announced to them again the Comforter promised by His Father, and commanded them to go throughout the whole earth, preaching the gospel to all creatures. Then, as was His wont, He led them out beyond Bethania, to that Mount of Olives, so often the witness of His fatherly instructions, and the witness also of His agony and of the treason of Judas. Then, renewing His promises and announcing to them that they should be His witnesses even to the ends of the earth, He lifted up His hands and blessed them. "And it came to pass whilst He blessed them, He departed from them and was carried up to heaven.* And a cloud received Him out of their sight."†

Who can say what passed in the hearts of the apostles when their beloved Master disappeared into heaven, and they found themselves once again alone upon the earth? But this time, trusting in His promises, and submitting themselves to His Will, they did not dare to sigh nor to complain, but with eager eyes they watched

* St. Luke xxiv. 51.

† Acts i. 9.

His course as He went up, longing to follow Him, and thinking they still saw His divine hands stretched forth to bless them, as He ascended to His Father.

“And while they were beholding Him going up to heaven, behold two men stood by them in white garments; who said: Ye men of Galilee, why stand you looking up to heaven? This Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come as you have seen Him going into heaven. Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount that is called Olivet, which is nigh Jerusalem, within a sabbath-day’s journey.”*

Sorrowful as children who have lost their father, they assemble in the place in which Jesus Himself had assembled them on the eve of His death, to eat the first true Pasch with them, and in which He had appeared amongst them, for the first time after His resurrection. It was as we have seen, a large furnished room, which Peter and John at the command of their Master had demanded, and which the master of the house had joyfully given.

* Acts i. 10, 12.

To them it was the most holy sanctuary in Jerusalem, consecrated by the great mystery of the holy Eucharist, and by the living memory of Jesus. Thither did those who had loved Him return to speak of Him, and to gather themselves around the twelve, and around her whom God had left for the consolation, enlightenment, and support of the infant Church. "All these," say the Acts of the Apostles, "were persevering with one mind in prayer with the women, and *Mary the Mother of Jesus.*"

How wonderful were the prayers and communings of these first faithful ones! How ardently did they beseech their God not to leave them orphans, to send them, according to His promise, the Holy Ghost, the Comforter! How often did they tell over one to another every word, every least action of their Saviour! Each disciple contributed his recollection of what he had heard and seen. Each one who had witnessed the goodness and the miracles of infinite charity, shed abroad amongst men during the last three years, came to add one more touch to the divine story told by the apostles, as it were one more pearl to

the treasure of the Church. John again and again told the sweetness of His love; Matthew and Bartholomew, the power of His divine vocation, to draw the soul away from the world; James and Andrew, the wonderful sweetness which His love gives to labour and poverty; Thomas, His mercy, and how He sheds into the soul the light of His faith. And Peter, with the dignity of a superior, and the humility of a saint, consoled His brethren by the authority of the divine promises, and calling to mind the Passion and his own fall, wept those tears, the source of which dried up only with his life, and which, according to an ancient tradition, wore two furrows in his venerable countenance. And how wonderful was Mary's share in this treasure of memories, from which the inspiration of the Holy Ghost was to draw forth the Gospel! Then that pure light, hitherto obscured by the brightness of the glory of a present Jesus, was left to shine upon the eyes of men. And now that the divine Sun has finished His earthly course, she, in whom is reflected the divine brightness, shines with a kindly light upon the earth. If our Saviour, in ascending to His Father,

did not at once take with Him into His glory, her who had shared all His sufferings; if the holy mother had to remain for long years, still united to her Son by faith and love, but deprived of His presence on this sad earth, it was because He left her a great mission to fulfil. Left in the midst of the infant Church, a venerable witness of the first mysteries of our faith, she was there to reflect the light of heaven on the truths which it had been our Lord's Will to leave in shade, during His earthly life, on the sacred marvels of His incarnation, His birth and His youth. The Holy Spirit shortly afterwards descended on the apostles, filling them with light and fire, rendering them worthy messengers of the Lord. But the inspiration of the Holy Spirit did not render useless their memories, and the testimony of the Blessed Virgin to the facts of the life and birth of Jesus Christ. His light showed to the apostles the hidden meaning of the things they had seen and heard, and of those which the Mother of God had since revealed to them. He gave them faith to believe it, and invincible courage to announce it to the world. But it was the

will of God, that their personal testimony and that of the Blessed Virgin should be an unanswerable proof to confound unbelievers in all ages, who would deny that which was revealed by divine inspiration alone. It was His Will, that these truths which we believe through His grace, since faith is a supernatural gift, should yet be surrounded with proofs, a thousand times more evident than those on which human reason is content to believe earthly events. Jesus Himself had said : " When the Paraclete cometh, Whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, Who proceedeth from the Father, He shall give testimony of Me, and you shall give testimony, because you are with Me from the beginning." The apostles, inspired by the Holy Ghost, and endowed with miraculous powers, employed at the same time their authority as eye witnesses to convert souls. St. John announced to the first faithful, " The word of life, that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled."

Who then could render this testimony

more completely and more magnificently than the Blessed Virgin? Of her it has been said, that she was with our Saviour from the beginning even unto the end. She and she alone knew of the miracle of the divine Incarnation, when the angel of the Lord announced it to her, and the Word was made flesh in her chaste womb. She kept the secret faithfully, and waited with brave humility, until the Lord sent His angel to Joseph to reveal to him the matchless dignity of the Immaculate Virgin, and the coming of the infant God.

Joseph was dead when Jesus began to preach. She alone, then, could transmit to the apostles the marvels of the Infancy and of the Incarnation of Jesus. The Visitation, the first testimony borne to our Saviour by St. Elizabeth, the wonderful prophecy of the Magnificat, the holy Christmas night, the Worship of the Magi, the Presentation in the temple and the prophecy of Simeon, the wisdom of the Child Jesus, putting to shame the wisdom of the Doctors, and lastly, the humble subjection in which the first thirty years of our Saviour's life were passed. Of all these things, Mary was the sole witness.

And St. Luke the Evangelist, who relates them more in detail, himself reveals to us this truth, by saying, three separate times, "And His Mother kept all these words in her heart." "As if," says a pious writer, "when entering into the details of these mysteries, the Evangelist wished to point out Mary as his authority."*

The light of Mary's testimony falls directly on the most fundamental articles of our faith. All Christian truths rest on the divinity of Jesus Christ. Now, although the homage of St. John the Baptist, the voice of God Himself speaking from the highest heaven, the person of our Saviour, His Majesty, the might of His words, the splendour of His miracles, and the superhuman sanctity of His life, should render a magnificent testimony to His divinity; ignorance, or imperfect knowledge of the mystery of the Incarnation, caused men to lose their way in darkness and wonder.

It was part of the purpose of God, that

* Auguste Nicolas, *La Vierge Marie d'après l'Evangile*, p. 497. All that is here said, on the mission left to the Blessed Virgin after the resurrection, is taken from the beautiful chapter entitled, *Maria au Cénacle*.

this great marvel of the divine power should remain hidden in the shades of mystery as long as the Incarnate Word remained here below, in order that the faith of His first disciples might have greater merit, and that they might recognize their God by that superhuman virtue which went forth from Him, no less for the enlightening of the soul than for the healing of the body. Mary had marvelously thrown herself into this design of God, which suited so well with her deep humility, and as long as Jesus lived, she faithfully maintained a humble silence on the mystery of her divine maternity. In vain did the unbelieving Jews see our Saviour "work miracles, give sight to the blind and open the ears of the deaf, raise the dead, cause devils to tremble, and command the sea and the storm; they cried out, a great Prophet has risen amongst us, and they would willingly have made Him King, but when called upon to worship Him as God, they brought up against Him His apparent origin, and they were scandalized in Him."

As to the Apostles, basking in the very rays of the divine light, they believed

they recognized in their Master something more than man, more than prophet, and Peter, in the ardour of his faith, cried out, "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God!" But how many shadows darkened their faith! We can judge of this, even by the reply of Jesus to St. Peter's confession. "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar Jona, because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but My Father Who is in heaven. And I say to thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." If the election of St. Peter as head of the Church is the reward of his generous faith, it is plain that this faith is not found in an equal degree in all the Apostles. They loved their Master; they had left all to follow Him; His Divinity continually struck them, and penetrated their minds as light penetrates a dwelling which is not closed against it. But when God, to increase the merit of their faith, veiled this Divine light, they not as yet understanding the sublime mystery of the Incarnate Word, began

once more to hesitate. And when the cross, shame, and death fell upon the Shepherd and dispersed the flock, their souls became a prey to mourning and despair. In weeping for the man, it seems as if they no longer recognized the God, and the disciples going to Emmaus, when they expressed their grief before the Divine traveller, unknowing Who He was, found only these words to describe their Master: "A prophet, mighty in work and word before God and all the people."*

Thus wavering was the faith, even of the Apostles, nourished with the very word of our Saviour, honoured by His friendship, eye-witnesses of His miracles, until He had clearly convinced them of the truth of His resurrection, and had sent them His Holy Spirit, to perfect their instruction, and to strengthen them. How severely, then, would the faith of future Christians have been tried had they not perfectly known the divine mystery of the Incarnation of the Eternal Word, together with all the wonderful circumstances of

* St. Luke xxiv. 19.

the Annunciation of the Angel to Mary. God in His goodness has been pleased to spare us this trial, and on this point, so important to our faith, to give us the most complete light. He was pleased that the book which contained the treasure of our Saviour's teaching, should contain the whole secret of His adorable Incarnation, in order that, when the world no longer looked on "the person of the Word, it might have for the foundation of its faith, the living and perfect knowledge of the Incarnation of the Word in the immaculate womb of the most holy Virgin Mary."* And to effect this what has He done? He left on the earth her to whom "the treasure of so great a mystery had been given in charge, and who had, as it were, kept it buried in her heart in order that in due time it might be revealed to all the faithful."† It was from her words, and, so to speak, under her dictation, that the Evangelists wrote the accounts of the Annunciation and of the birth of our

* Nicolas.

† This testimony cannot be regarded with suspicion, it is that of Calvin, quoted by Nicolas.

Saviour, and it is beautiful to see that the Apostle who has spoken of the Incarnation of the Word with the most majestic authority and in the most sublime language, is St. John, whom Jesus had left as a son to His Mother. "It is not surprising," says a great doctor of the Church, "that John should have spoken of the divine mysteries better than the other Evangelists, since he passed his life near the temple in which these heavenly mysteries were accomplished."*

Once more, then, let us bless Mary, for, according to the testimony of the devout author from whom I have taken all this chapter, she cooperated in the completion and perfection of the Christian faith, in the upper chamber at Jerusalem, as efficaciously as in the redemption on Calvary, and the Incarnation at Nazareth. As she is the Mother of our God, so is she the Mother of our faith, and we see now for what end she is in the upper chamber, and with what right she takes part in the great miracle of Pentecost. Spouse of the

* "Mirum non est, præ cæteris Johannem locutum esse mysteria divina qui presta erat aula cœlestium sacramentorum."—St. Ambrose, quoted by Nicolas.

Holy Ghost, she was the first to be enlightened by His light. She is the spotless mirror, who is to reflect her light most powerfully on the infant Church.

“And when the days of Pentecost were accomplished, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them parted tongues, as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them: and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak.”*

What a marvel is here! As these divine flames rest on the apostles, their minds are enlightened and their souls inflamed. They are no longer the ignorant fishermen, the weak men, whose hearts are so slow to believe, who hide themselves while their Master is suffering, and who seem to accept with hesitation the hope of His resurrection; they have become doctors of divine science, filled with learning, such as the

* Acts ii. 1, 4.

wise of this world never dreamt of. Invincible heroes who fear neither contempt, torments nor death. Witnesses who fearlessly carry the Word of God even to the ends of the earth, and sign their testimony with their blood. They follow their chief out of the upper chamber. They speak to the crowd assembled at Jerusalem from all parts of the earth, for the Feast of Pentecost, and each one hears them speak in the language of his own country. All are struck with wonder and admiration, saying, "Behold, are not all these that speak Galileans? and how have we heard every man our own tongue wherein we were born."* Peter standing in the midst of the eleven apostles lifts up his voice. He silences the wonder of the crowd, and the mockings of some impious Jews. He speaks in the name of his Master, of that Jesus of Nazareth, Who, "being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you, by the hands of wicked men, have crucified and slain." And at his voice all the crowd is struck with stupor. The Acts tell us, that

* Acts ii. 7, 8.

“they had compunction in their heart, and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, What shall we do, men and brethren? And Peter said to them, Do penance, and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”*

And that day three thousand souls were added to the Lord's flock, and God multiplied miracles by the hands of the apostles, and fear spread throughout Jerusalem. Souls prepared to receive the truth, came in crowds to seek it from the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. Every time that Peter and his brethren spoke in the synagogues, or in the public places, thousands of penitent souls were gathered by the nets of these fishers of men. The Church was growing, and the holy Mother of God opened her arms to those in affliction, who were the first to fly to them for refuge. In vain did the impious Pharisees and the proud doctors of the law imprison the apostles, and cause them to be beaten with rods like their divine

* Acts ii. 38.

Master; and in vain did they bathe their hands in the blood of St. Stephen, the first martyr; they soon found by experience that nothing could stop either the power of the Word of God, or the growth of the grain of mustard seed, which, planted by our Saviour and watered with His blood, soon became a great tree, and threw its shadow far over the earth. When for a time our Lord seemed to suffer the wicked to triumph, and the apostles, according to the command of their Master, shook off from their feet the dust of the ungrateful city, it is said that the daughter of David left Jerusalem weeping, as she had formerly left Nazareth, and that following the steps of her adopted son John, she gave the blessing of her presence to the new Church at Ephesus. It is said that God left her on the earth for twenty-three years, to enlighten the apostles and evangelists, to encourage and instruct the first faithful, and to shine on the Infant Church in the twilight that followed the setting of the divine Sun, as she had shone in that which ushered in His dawn.

This day, let our hearts be fixed on our holy mother, accepting these last years of

exile for the love of us, and sharing the labours of the apostles and the sufferings of the first Christians.

Let us think of Mary, the Mother of our God, the Mother of our Faith. In how many souls has she not truly been the Mother of Faith, softening them, and preparing them by repentance for the pardon and light which her prayers were to obtain for them !

May she have softened some of us during this month which is drawing to a close, and blessed be our sweet Saviour for having assembled us to meditate together on her perfections !

Prayer.

O holy Mother of Jesus, risen and triumphant at the right hand of His Father, by the exile which thou didst accept for us, take pity on thy children exiled on the earth. Thou wast pleased to taste of all our sorrows, and thy love for Jesus far surpassing ours, thou knowest better than any of us what a soul loses, which lives separated from its Saviour and its God. Teach us, then, the secret by which thou didst live

with Him, though far from Him. And then, O sweet, O merciful, O kind Virgin Mary, accomplish in our souls the holy ministry which thou didst accomplish on earth towards the first faithful. Pour down from thine own heart into ours the precious teaching of the hidden life of Jesus. Often recall our thoughts to it. Teach us to conform our lives to it, so that we may better understand His holy Word, and love His Will more entirely. May our exile be sweetened and sanctified by the thought of thine ! May its days be filled with labour and love, and deign, O Mary, to open to us thine arms, that our exile, like thine, may end in our true country. Amen.

Practice.

To labour for the good of souls by example and prayer, while meditating on Mary's mission after the resurrection.

THIRTY-FIRST DAY.

THE ASSUMPTION.

Queen of Angels, pray for us.

This day let us rejoice; for we have long meditated on the sorrows of our Mother, and have sought in them consolation and example for ourselves. We must now speak of her glory, of the glory which rewards her virtues and sufferings, as the harvest rewards weary labour, and seeds sown in due season. And what hopes will not mingle with the filial joy of the children of Mary, when they meditate on the grandeur, and the holy lessons, of her glorious Assumption. In the life of their Mother they have seen the type of the Christian life, perfected and transfigured. In her Assumption they will also see the sublime and transfigured type of their life beyond the grave. Doubtless no other creature will ever attain to like glory, because no creature ever received graces like those which God dispensed to Mary,

in consideration of her Divine Maternity; because no creature ever corresponded so faithfully to graces received; because no earthly sorrows ever resembled her sorrows, or merited a like reward. But in the sublime perfection which shines in Mary's life, we see what ours may become; and in the brightness of her glory in heaven, we see what may one day be our beatitude. Humble imitators in this world of the most perfect of creatures, we may in eternity be the humble subjects of the Queen of Heaven.

Everything is linked together, everything is uniform in the works of God. Death, as we have more than once said, is like the echo of life. Now the life of Mary being, by its perfection, above all human lives, her death cannot resemble that of the other children of Adam. Predestined by God, from the first promise of a Saviour, prepared by every grace for the miracle of her divine Maternity, how can we think of her as tainted by the corruption of the grave? Conceived without sin, the sting of death should have no power over her, for death, as we know, came into the world in consequence of

original sin. The end of her earthly life was the same through which all human beings pass, only because she too is human, and because that nature which her Divine Son took of her is the same with our own. But in her death there is no terror, no bitterness, and when a flight of love united her blessed soul to her Son, God did not permit the virginal body, once the sanctuary of the Eternal Word, to turn to dust, as does our miserable flesh, corrupted from the beginning by sin. Chosen by God to participate in the holy mysteries by which our salvation was accomplished, she was to follow into heaven the Saviour Whom she gave to the world, the Divine Son Whose sufferings she had shared.

“The mystery we are celebrating,” says Bossuet, “has a peculiar connection with the Incarnation of the Eternal Word. For us the divine Mary formerly received our Saviour Jesus; it is just that our Saviour in His turn should receive the happy Mary, and that, having deigned to descend into her, He should afterwards raise her to Himself, and receive her into glory. We must not then wonder that

the blessed Mary rises with so much splendour, nor that she triumphs with so much majesty. Jesus, to whom this Virgin gave life, gives it back to her in gratitude to-day. And as God never suffers Himself to be surpassed in magnificence, though the life He had received was but mortal, it became His Majesty to give His Mother in return, a glorious life in heaven. Thus are these two mysteries bound in one. Lastly, that the likeness may be still greater, the angels took part in both, and shared in Mary's joy at the crowning of the mystery they had been the first to announce."

What shall we then say of the mystery of the Redemption, and of the sorrowful share taken in it by the holy Mother of the Redeemer? We have seen her standing at the foot of the cross, suffering in her heart all that Jesus suffered in His body; we have seen that the grief of this Divine Mother added to the sufferings of Jesus, and that, according to the prophecy of Simeon, for our salvation the same sword pierced the soul of the Son and the soul of the Mother. If Jesus said to the disciples going to Emmaus, "O foolish

and slow of heart.....ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and so enter into His glory?" could it be that these things suffered by her in union with her Son, should not be the way to glory for Mary as well as for Jesus? Could it be that she who had had so bitter a share in His sufferings should not have a magnificent share in His triumph? Could it be that the glorious ascension of Jesus should not find as it were an echo in the glorious Assumption of Mary, since every detail of the life of Jesus had its echo, either of joy or sorrow, in the soul of His Mother?

We cannot doubt this truth. The glory of Mary is as certain as her predestination, as her immaculate conception, as her Divine Maternity, as her sufferings united to those of her Son: moreover, it has been acknowledged and taught by the Church from the beginning, and supported by the testimony of the Saints in all ages. We know but little of her death and triumph, for the deep humility which veils from us everything in her blessed life which is not inseparably united to that of Jesus, veils from us also the end. The Evangelists

who, under the direction of the Mother of God, recorded the highest mysteries of the Incarnation and Childhood of the Word, and showed us every action of Mary which reflected the light of Jesus, guided by her humility, kept silence on the details of her twenty years of exile and apostleship after the ascension, and also of her blessed death. But as the memory of a beloved mother is preserved by dutiful sons, and the circumstances of her death are transmitted by them as a precious lesson to their children, so the tradition of that blessed death has passed through all ages and has come down to us.

This tradition tells us that the Blessed Virgin Mary remained on earth until the age of seventy-two years, to enlighten and console the infant Church. "Jesus," says Bossuet, "had left in this world the Church, His Spouse, young, widowed, desolate and without support; Mary was given to her to be her support, and the sole consolation of all the faithful on the earth. In each one of its members she saw her Son. Her compassion was a prayer for all who suffered; her heart united itself with the hearts of those who were in sor-

row, to aid them in their cry for comfort ; with all charitable hearts, to urge them to hasten to relieve, support and console the distressed and afflicted. She shared the work of every apostle who proclaimed the Gospel, of every martyr who sealed it with his blood, of every one of the faithful who observed its precepts, attended to its counsels, and imitated its examples."

But at length the time came, when the Church was to exchange the blessing of her presence, for the blessing of her intercession in heaven. Then her mother's love, of which nothing here below can give us an idea, burst the earthly dwelling which detained her soul. It is said, that the Child of David came back to Jerusalem to die, still accompanied by the beloved disciple ; that the report of her approaching death gathered many of the apostles round her bed, and that with them, were St. Timothy, first bishop of Ephesus, and St. Denis the Areopagite, who himself speaks of it in his writings. "Then," says Bossuet, "the divine virgin, without pain or struggle, gave back her holy and blessed soul into the hands of her Son..... As the lightest touch sepa-

rates a ripe fruit from the tree, as flame of itself rises and mounts upwards, so was this blessed soul gathered, to be immediately transported to heaven. Thus did the divine virgin die, by a flight of divine love. Her soul was borne to heaven in an incense cloud of sacred longing, and therefore do the holy angels say: Who is she who goes up like the sweet-smelling breath of myrrh and incense?" Tradition says that the angels appeared round the bed of their queen, and their songs accompanied her blessed soul to heaven. In the mean time, the weeping apostles bore the body of their mother to the Garden of Gethsemane, and reverently buried her in the place where the Body of Jesus had rested. They had watched for three days by the sacred tomb, when the apostle St. Thomas, who had been prevented by distance from arriving in time at the bed side of his holy mother, asked as a last grace to see her face once more. His brethren yielded to his tears and prayers, and opened the tomb. They found nothing there but the flowers, scattered by the hands of the faithful in the cave of Gethsemane, and the linen cloths in which the virginal body had been

wrapped. The venerable sanctuary of the Eternal Word might not become the prey of worms, and the apostles enlightened by the Holy Ghost, understood their mother's triumph, and invoked in heaven her for whom they had wept on earth.

In contemplating this blessed death, this assumption of Mary into the glory of heaven, the natural end and consequence of her life, we see how the wonderful humility which marks the whole of Mary's earthly career is preserved even to the end. We see the marvellous contrast and the close union between the glory of the Mother of God, and the voluntary lowliness of His handmaid. Poor men, with staffs in their hands, come and group themselves round a death-bed in a poor dwelling. But all heaven is reflected in the looks of her who is dying, and the hour which to us is the bitter hour of the last combat, is to her the hour of triumph. The angels come and bear her away as a queen, and her earthly sons hardly dare to weep for her. She is buried without pomp, without splendour. Grief itself is silent by this tomb at which the apostles and their brethren of Jerusalem are watching;

the songs of the angels mingle with their hymns on the hill of Gethsemane, and when at the entreaty of one of their brethren they reopen the tomb, nothing remains but flowers and perfumes. Mary's blessed body is gone up to heaven, leaving no trace on the earth; but the apostles learn that the Lord hath regarded the humility of His handmaid, and that she is in heaven, living in her blessed soul and glorified body, seated at the foot of the throne of her Son, and stretching her spotless hands towards Him to implore pardon for men.

“O Mother of Jesus Christ!” cries Bos-suet, “because thou didst call thyself handmaid, this day humility prepares a throne for thee. Seat thyself upon this high throne, and receive the sceptre of power over all creatures. O virgin, all holy and all innocent, purer than the rays of the sun, thou wert willing to purify thyself, and to mix among sinners. Thou shalt be their second refuge, and their chief hope after Jesus Christ. *Refugium peccatorum*. Thou didst lose thy Son; He seemed to have quitted thee, leaving thee to sigh so long in a strange land. Because thou

didst submit with patience to this humiliation, thy Son will reassume His rights, which but for a short time he had yielded to John. I see Him, O happy virgin, He holds out His arms towards thee, and after thee the whole court of heaven gazes with admiration, as thou goest up overflowing with delights, leaning upon thy Beloved."

Thou art indeed leaning on thy Beloved, O Blessed Virgin! From Him doth all thy glory flow; His mercy is the source of all thy merits; and if it be true that the harmony of this universe is maintained by the music of the celestial spheres, may they now intone a new hymn of praise; may the heavenly virtues by whom their movements are directed, invite them to give new signs of joy. And if it be lawful for us to imagine scenes so majestic, I picture to myself that as he gazed upon his Queen, Moses could not but repeat that beautiful prophecy left to us in his books: "A star shall rise out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall spring up from Israel." Isaias, filled with the Spirit of God, sang with ineffable joy, "Behold that Virgin who was to conceive and bring forth a Son." And in the midst of them all, the

Royal Prophet David, to the sound of his heavenly harp, poured forth this wondrous canticle, "The Queen stood on thy right hand in gilded clothing, surrounded with variety. All the glory of the king's daughter is within, in golden borders clothed round about with varieties. After her shall virgins be brought to the king, they shall be brought with gladness and rejoicing." Then the blessed spirits were silent, and Mary herself from the bottom of her soul, once again poured forth those wondrous words : " My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. Because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid ; for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."

Thus ended as it had begun, the most humble and glorious of all lives. It is because the Lord hath regarded the humility of His handmaid, that all generations shall call her blessed. Let us then, the sons of saints, disciples of Jesus, and children of Mary, let us take with us to-day from the foot of her altar, the same deep conviction of this truth which the apostles long ago took with them from her tomb.

Let us learn from her, as from her Divine Son, to be meek and humble of heart. Every day as we invoke her aid, let us labour to root out pride from our souls, and patiently to gather up a treasure of humility, which at the last day may be our riches and our hope. May it please God and His holy mother, our advocate and our model, that this month, dedicated to the meditation of her life, may have excited in us all a strong will to serve God. Let us ask this grace for one another, and may we one and all attain the blessings which are the portion of the humble on earth and in heaven.

Prayer.

O holy Mother of God, so glorious in thy humility, so humble in thy glory, teach us the love of that virtue which shines forth equally in thine earthly life, and in thine eternal reign in heaven. Teach us quite to forget ourselves, to love Jesus above all things, and to accept everything for the love of Jesus, O thou who even in the bosom of eternal blessedness hast so merciful a tenderness for sin-

ners ! And whilst thy maternal power is appeasing the justice of thy divine Son, may the conquering attraction of thy maternal love, also draw thy sinful children into the paths that thou hast opened to them, in which thou hast walked before them, and in which they can follow thee ! May they, by the grace of God and the help of thy prayers, ever follow the holy banner of thy humility. Under it will they be victorious in all combats, and will obtain a share in thy glory. Amen.

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